OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER™

THE EVOLUTION OF MINER 2049ER

BILL HOGUE'S JOURNEY AS A PLATFORM-GAME PIONEER

THE MAKING OF CIVILIZATION II

DISCOVER HOW MICROPROSE BUILT THE STRATEGY CLASSIC

SILK WORM

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BEHIND THE SCENES OF RAVEN SOFTWARE'S GORY PC SHOOTER

THE MAKING OF GHOSTBUSTERS II

THE SMALL TEAM TASKED WITH MAKING A HUGE MOVIE LICENCE

ALSO INSIDE

TARGET: RENEGADE
LAURANT WEILL
RIDGE RACER REVOLUTION
TURBODUO
SEAQUEST
ATLANTIS
HORACE

A TRIBUTE TO TREASURE

FROM GUNSTAR HEROES TO IKARUGA: STUDIO PRESIDENT MASATO MAEGAWA REVISITS HIS MOST CELEBRATED GAMES

FUTURE
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LOADING...

During the Nineties I regularly found myself on both sides of the console war, mainly because I'd often alternate between the Mega Drive and SNES and would promote each one accordingly. When I was team Mega Drive one of the biggest weapons you could wield against SNES owners was Treasure. The developer's output on Sega's 16-bit console was phenomenally strong and I'd often cite the likes of *Gunstar Heroes*, *Alien Soldier* and *Dynamite Headdy* as solid reasons for being on team Sega. Its output on the next generation was equally good and the likes of *Radiant Silvergun* and *Guardian Heroes* not only earned high acclaim, but highlighted just how good pixel-based art could look on 32-bit machines.

It's a huge thrill then to be able to not only revisit Treasure's catalogue of games, but also feature insight from Treasure's president, Masato Maegawa. He's kindly shared all sorts of fascinating anecdotes and revisits the majority of Treasure's diverse library. We rarely get to look at an acclaimed developer in such a way, so I really hope you enjoy it.

Outside of our Treasure coverage we have plenty of great articles, including a chat will Bill Hogue about his *Miner 2049er* games, and a behind the scenes look at *Speed Freaks*, *Civilization II* and Raven Software's gory *Soldier Of Fortune*. Oh, and make sure you check out the great bank holiday subs offer on page 103 where you can get five issues of the magazine for just £5.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE TREASURE GAME?

DARRAN JONES

I think it has to be *Sin & Punishment*. When I covered the game for *games™*, people couldn't believe it was running on an N64. It looked that good.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls, a SNES-loving cousin and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Rogue Legacy*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

Dynamite Headdy. I flipping loved that game – brilliant graphics, and all those heads led to some fantastic gameplay.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go off the service
Currently playing: *Octopath Traveller*
Favourite game of all time: *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*

NICK THORPE

I think it's *Astro Boy* for me – it's a brilliant beat-'em-up and the way it's structured is very clever.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Now playing: *Chu Chu Rocket*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

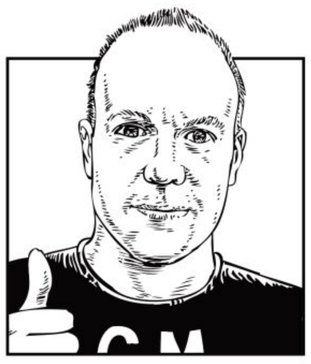
I think the only Treasure game I've played is *Light Crusader* and I don't really remember anything about. So it's my favourite by default I guess.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently playing: *M&B2: Bannerlord*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War*

DREW SLEEP

Playing *Dynamite Headdy* was a pretty odd experience for my four-year-old mind, but even at that young age, I knew it was a Mega Drive game that had something special about it.
Expertise: Burying *Dig Dug* secrets in the mag that Darran will never, ever find
Currently playing: *Monster Hunter Rise*
Favourite game of all time: *Final Fantasy VIII*

PAUL DRURY

Ikaruga for when I want my blasting vertical and *Gradius V* for when I'm feeling more laid back.
Expertise: Sunken cities
Currently playing: *Circus Convoy*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*

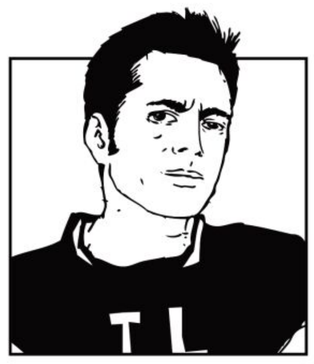


GRAEME MASON

I have very fond memories of *Light Crusader*, one of Treasure's lesser known games. It's so ethereal and beautiful, complete with a wonderful soundtrack.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Table Tennis VR*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

RORY MILNE

I love them all, but I'll say *Guardian Heroes* – Treasure's 'fighting RPG'. Not just because it looks amazing and plays beautifully, but because it showed mid-Nineties me that sprites could still cut it.
Expertise: The game I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Spy Vs Spy*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*



IAIN LEE

Ikaruga did it for me. Absolutely stunning game.
Expertise: Buying overpriced stuff on eBay then never touching it
Currently playing: A lot of prop hunt in *Call Of Duty*
Favourite game of all time: *Elite* (BBC Model B)

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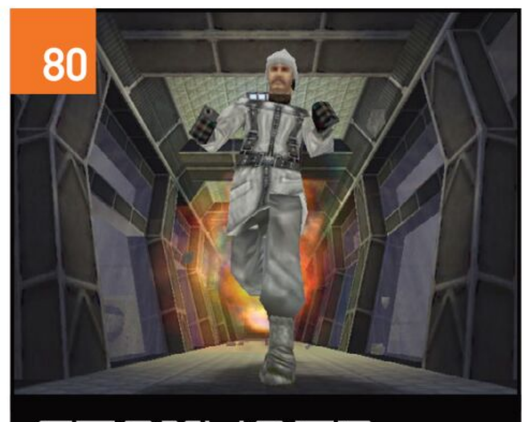

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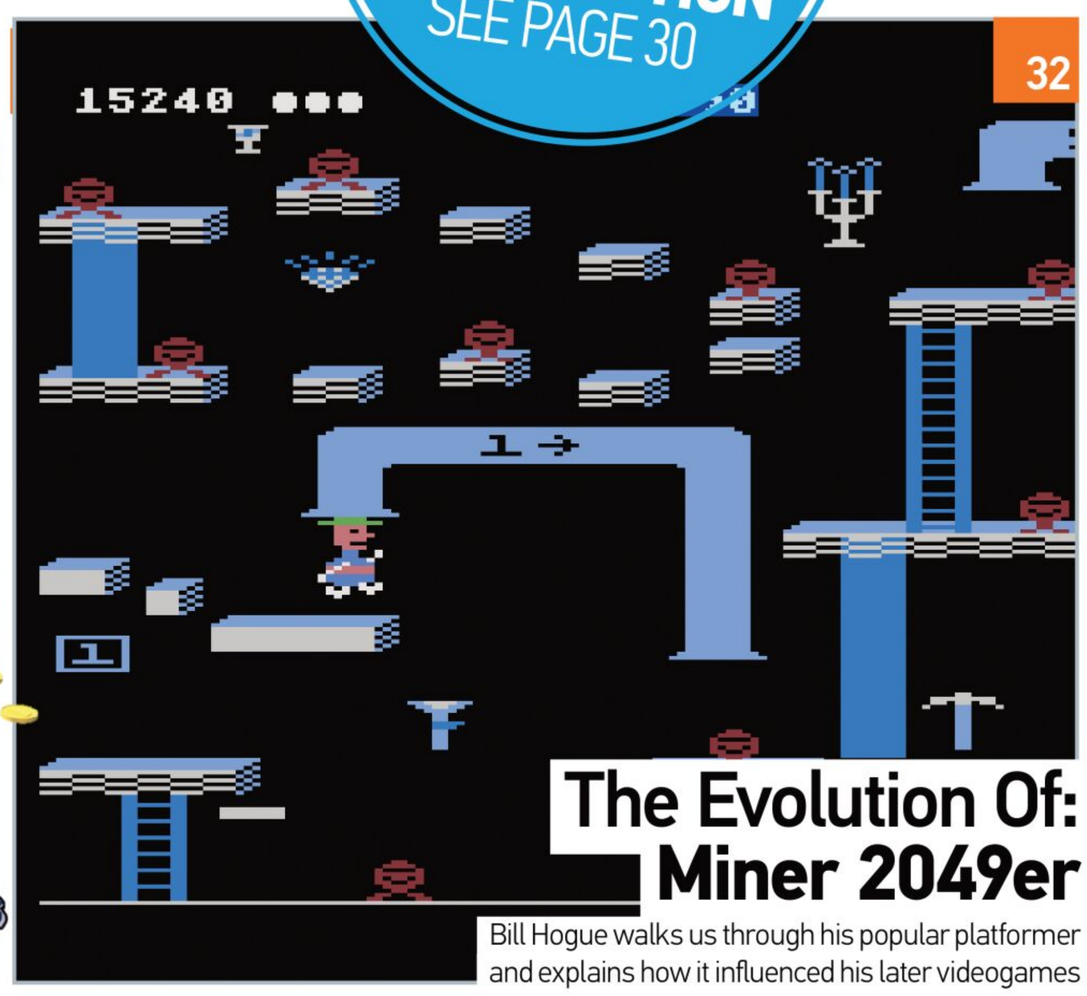
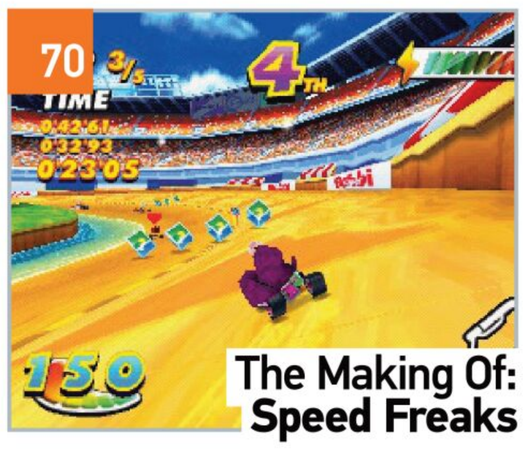


The Evolution Of: Miner 2049er

Bill Hogue walks us through his popular platformer and explains how it influenced his later videogames



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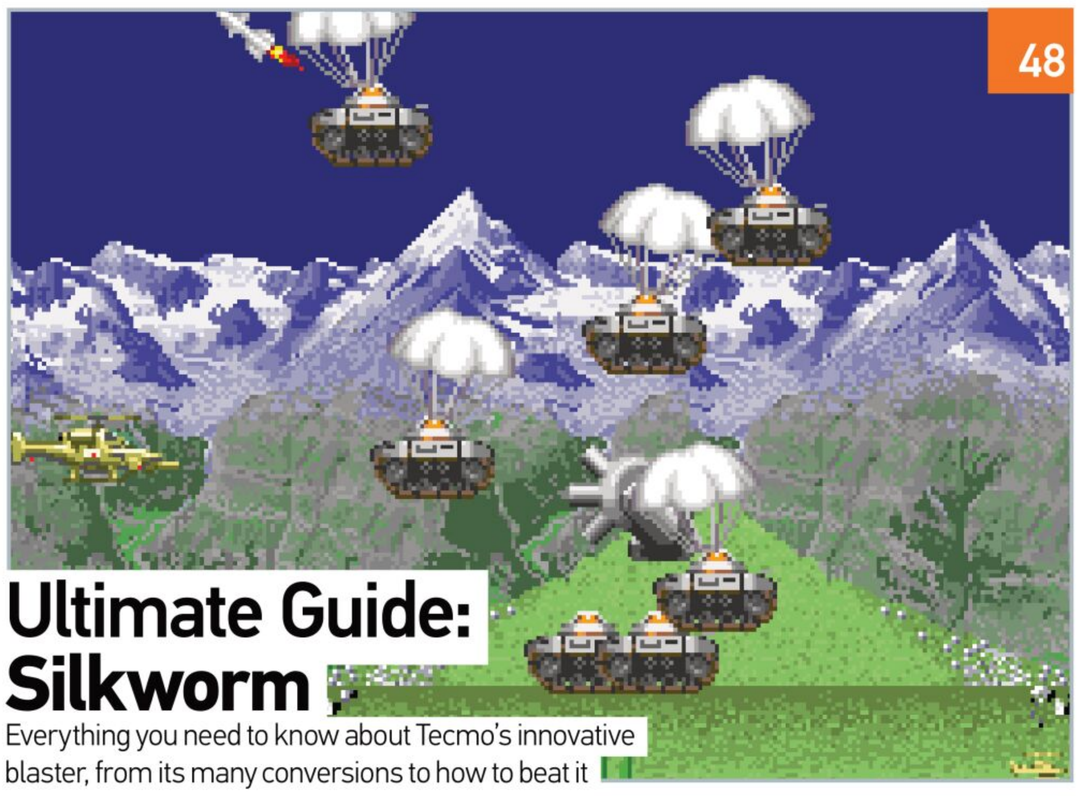

Ultimate Guide: Silkworm

Everything you need to know about Tecmo's innovative blaster, from its many conversions to how to beat it

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Wherever Sub-Zero goes, you know that his fiery counterpart Scorpion will never be far behind.

KREATING KOMBAT

Director Simon McQuoid discusses Mortal Kombat's big screen return

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Find out how Feral Interactive's brand-new remaster of *Rome: Total War* is shaping up

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
Nick finds himself in June 2004 and smells a handheld console war

The original *Mortal Kombat* movie from 1995 is something of an outlier amongst Hollywood adaptations of videogames. As a decently enjoyable watch that represented its source material faithfully, it was considered for a long time to be arguably the best videogame movie. In fact, all of the videogame movies that outrank *Mortal Kombat* on Rotten Tomatoes have been released in the last three years. The movie remains popular with fans, and it can be hard to compete with that sort of nostalgic fondness, but *Mortal Kombat* has already successfully rebooted once before – the 2011 videogame introduced a revamped fighting model and coupled it with a cinematic story mode that renewed focus on classic characters. Ten years on, we're about to see if director Simon McQuoid will achieve similar success with his movie reboot.

The Australian director, who is making his feature debut, is keenly aware of the challenges in tackling the much loved series. "*Mortal Kombat*'s really evolved over the years, and each person has their own version of *Mortal Kombat* that they connect with. There's the original classic, and then there's the movies, and then there's stuff that's evolved in the most recent games, which are far more expansive and have deeper, richer, kind of movie-like narratives," he explains. "We've tried to take elements from across the board, and really take into account where it's been. I think that's something we've consciously tried to do – not just remake the first film, but also not forget it totally." To that end, the new movie is a full reboot with no continuity ties to the Nineties films. "I really wanted to claim a new space, and a new tone and a new feeling for this film," says Simon.

Mortal Kombat stars Lewis Tan as series newcomer Cole Young, a cage fighter who suddenly finds himself being hunted down by Sub-Zero (Joe Taslim). "We're truly trying to expand the fanbase of *Mortal Kombat* to a degree, and there was an element of educating a new audience, a new set of eyes, while a new character gets educated," explains Simon on the decision to lead with an original character. "The studio and myself felt that *Mortal Kombat* is constantly introducing new characters, and it actually didn't feel overly controversial to us." On instruction from Jax (Mehcad Brooks), Cole seeks to rendezvous with Sonya Blade (Jessica McNamee) to learn about his true heritage and his role in the interdimensional conflict with the forces of Outworld, led by Shang Tsung (Chin Han). While the cast is loaded with familiar faces from the first two games, Simon has been

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» Director Simon McQuoid and the crew having fun putting a scene together.

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» Jax quickly learns that his gunfire is no match for Sub-Zero's ice.

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» Seeing Liu Kang and Kung Lao together, we ought to remind you that *Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks* is really quite good.

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» The film was shot at Adelaide Studios and other locations in the south of Australia.

Copyright 2021 Warner Bros / Photo: Mark Rogers

» Simon works through a scene with Lewis Tan, who looks like he's ready for a scrap.

keen to incorporate some unexpected fighters. "There's something kind of interesting and exciting to me about bringing in lesser-known characters that for different reasons have some really good properties to bring into a cinematic experience – of which you'll find out when you see the film."

Those sorts of deep cuts need knowledge, and Simon admits to having had to do "a shitload" of research on *Mortal Kombat* for the film. "It's so dense and so rich, and so evolving and so ever-changing, that it's a deep dive and I've tried my best to learn as much as I possibly can. Why bother doing this if you're going to not treat the source material with enormous respect? And I think that's why a lot of videogame movies perhaps might have failed in the past, they simply just don't respect it enough. When actors would come on, and when I was getting crew, I would say to them that we are respecting the material and that we are elevating the material. We're not really changing it, but we're bringing a big cinematic experience of it." To that end, some contact with the NetherRealm team has been incorporated into production. "I've chatted to Ed [Boon] and Ed's given us some really good insights along the way. I had some connection with those guys. It's not like they were deeply immersed in it, but we chatted."

The movie is set to incorporate more of the series' trademark lethal violence as some of the game's fatalities will make it to the silver screen for the first time, with the film having received an R age rating in the US, compared to the lower PG-13 rating of the 1995 movie. The martial arts credentials of the cast should ensure some exciting fights, too. "Joe Taslim is a phenomenal martial arts fighter – he represented Indonesia in Judo, he's just a supreme athlete," says Simon. "Max Huang who plays Kung Lao is also an extraordinary martial arts fighter. He came up in the Jackie Chan school and he's unbelievable." However, combat skills were not always the top priority in casting. "Jessica McNamee playing Sonya, she's very athletic and she did quite a few of her own stunts and she was pretty fantastic, but she's not a martial arts fighter and she didn't need to be. What I needed her to be was a really authentic, good actor and she did a great job. Ludi Lin, he's pretty gifted, he understands all that stuff as well, but really Ludi was brought on because Liu Kang has a certain kind of spirituality to him and that zen quality to him, and that's what Ludi really delivered." *

***Mortal Kombat* will be released in cinemas and via HBO Max on 16 April in the USA. It will be released in the UK in spring 2021.**

BOMBERMAN BLOWS UP

Konami has just revealed that *Super Bomberman R Online* will be heading to consoles and PCs soon. The game was originally a Stadia exclusive, but it's now heading to other platformers. The great news is that it caters for up to 64 players and is going to be completely free (with in-app purchases if that takes your fancy). Needless to say you can expect a review of Konami's chaotic battler in a later issue.

THE TURTLES ARE BACK

Tribute Games, the studio behind *Panzer Paladin* and *Flinthook* has just revealed that it's working on a brand-new *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* game. *Shredder's Revenge* is already looking rather swish and should scratch that itch we've had since finishing *Streets Of Rage 4*. It has a distinctive *Turtles In Time* vibe, caters for four players and already looks excellent. We're rather excited about this so expect more in-depth news as we get it.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainlee.

Retro impotency

How's your lockdown currently going? As we approach a year of this misery, I have found myself going slowly mad. Or maybe I'm rapidly descending into insanity, who knows? My latest example of potential downward spiral is I've been feeling guilty about my retro collection. It's not huge, but it's decent and it cost a fair few quid. It was expensive because a lot of my machines are modded, with flash cards. For a long time I was a purist and felt you needed to have the actual cartridge or disc but I don't like clutter so I thought this was the way to go.

Why the guilt? I hope you're asking, otherwise me sneaking that line in was pointless. Well, it's because I don't play them. My N64, Beeb, Dreamcast, Saturn et al sit under the TV and don't get used. I spent all that money acquiring them and yet I almost never play them. I call them 'my pile of shame'.

That's cruel, right? Like keeping animals in a zoo but not feeding them. Or having children but never speaking to them. They just sit there, looking at me, begging for affection but simply never getting it. Meanwhile, my filthy hands are all over the wanton PS5. One can only imagine what my GameCube must think after witnessing such flagrant infidelity.

Am I right to feel this guilt? Part of me thinks I should set all these beasts free, like some sort of protestor at a mink farm, sneaking in at the dead of night and cutting the bolts on the cages. But would the next owner treat them any better than I do or would they be forever condemned to a life of dust?

My Vectrex is sat right behind me as I type. I daren't look over my shoulder because I know she is staring at me, furious that yet again I am energetically running my fingers over the PC and ignoring her stunning, yet ageing, beauty. I probably haven't turned her on for close to two years and that is just awful, isn't it?

Here's the problem. I got rid of a much bigger collection 11 years ago when we were expecting our first child. It seemed like the right thing to do, clear space and be responsible. But I've spent most of the last ten years trying to get that stuff back. I'm worried that if I chucked this lot I'd end up doing the same. I guess my question is – is it OK to just have these things, safe in the knowledge I COULD play them any time I wanted? Do you do that? How do you overcome the guilt? Or maybe you are a sensible human being and don't have any guilt about such trivial matters?

This is what this current lockdown is doing to me. It's making me question almost every aspect of my life. Perhaps that's not such a bad thing or possibly it is? See, there I go questioning that bloomin' question! I need a hug, I think we all do. *

"I guess my question is – is it OK to just have these things, safe in the knowledge I COULD play them any time I wanted?"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Lightning in a bottle

The Nineties. Remember those? Going into that decade, I had little inkling that – for better and sometimes worse – I'd come out the other end having carved out my own small footnote in gaming history. I am of course talking about *Digitiser*, the daily gaming magazine I co-created and wrote, as Mr Biffo, for just over ten years, from 1993 to 2003.

For those of you who may not know, it ran in the UK on a service called Teletext. Confusingly, the medium was also called teletext (lower case 't'), and it was a sort of proto-internet, that could be accessed through TVs.

Even before I began working for Teletext – initially as a graphic designer – I had been a fan of teletext. I was an avid reader of Teletext's predecessor, Oracle. Like many in the UK, I have fond memories of its pages, and would contribute reader messages to its teen section (pre-email, we had to leave the messages on an answer machine, and some poor employee would need to transcribe any they chose to feature).

Consequently, I had a little idea of the medium's reach and ubiquity, but nothing prepared me for quite how popular *Digitiser* became. The combination of what was seen, at least for a time, as a kind of high-tech delivery system, coupled to the now well-documented fanaticism of gaming fans, coupled to our daily schedule, and the freedom to react to news as it happened, was lightning in a bottle.

Pretty soon after launch, we got our first viewing figures, and something like 1.3 million people tuned into *Digitiser* every week. Frankly, the numbers were so high that we struggled to wrap our heads around them, and continued to write the pages more like an irreverent fanzine than a big, mass-market publication.

I'm under no illusions that everyone who read *Digitiser* loved it. Indeed, we revelled in trying to wind people up, and there was a devil-may-care abandon in knowing that we were in a market of one. It was a few years into our existence before the internet took hold, and other sources became our real competitors.

However, it has become so clear in the years since I stopped writing *Digi* that those who loved it really loved it; somehow, as much for our bizarre characters and humour as for the actual quality of our information and opinions.

Looking back now, it's weird how much of gaming history I bore witness to. It was a transitional time and I watched gaming become truly mainstream, from *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* to the Xbox.

Unbelievably, *Digitiser* is still going. I brought it back as a website a few years ago, responding to demand from a handful of diehards who had kept the flag flying. In truth, the landscape had changed so much that *Digi* was no longer unique. Its irreverent attitude has been taken up by YouTubers and websites, superseded by meme culture. I trademarked the brand a few years ago, as much for myself as anything, and *Digi*'s attitude and silliness now continues on YouTube. However, it's remit has broadened somewhat, and **Retro Gamer** is mostly the only place I still talk about games.

Digi, with its characters and catchphrases, will likely follow me to my grave, and I wouldn't have it any other way. We shall never see its like again, even if I do say so myself. *

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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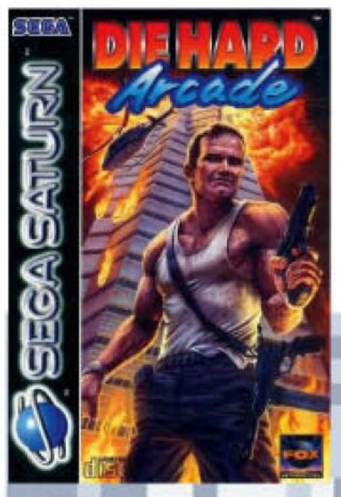

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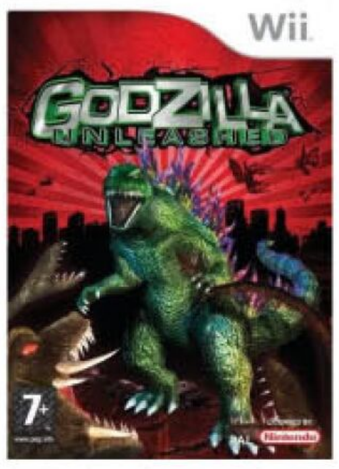

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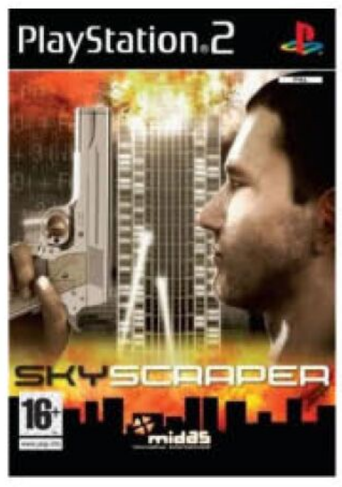

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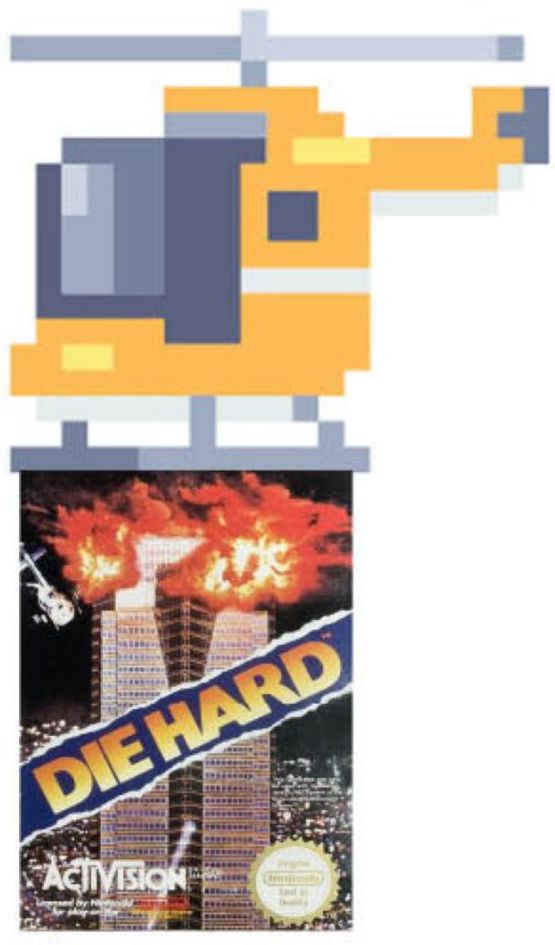

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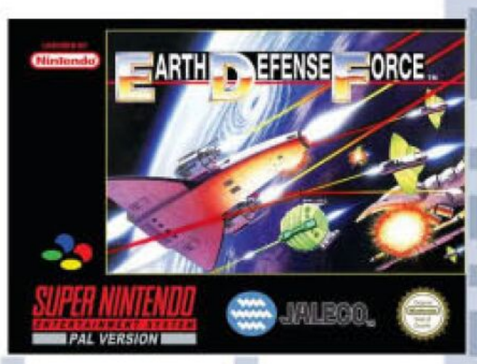

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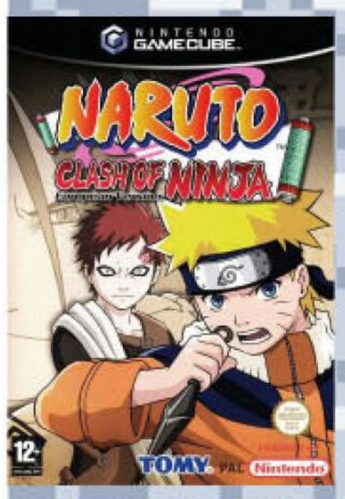

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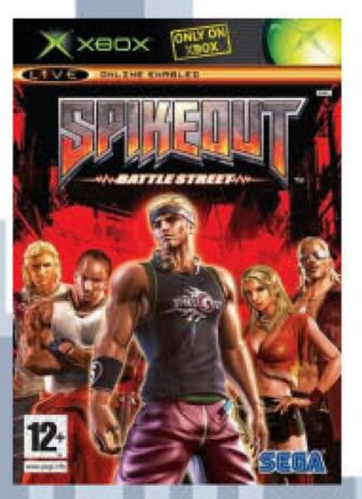

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TOTAL WAR™

ROME
REMASTERED

War reinvented

Kevin McDowell and Tom Massey on remastering Creative Assembly's strategy epic

» [PC] Tom reveals that *Rome*'s mechanics have been modernised in numerous areas including quality of life improvements and implementing useful features from previous *Total War* games.

Few strategy games are as beloved as the *Total War* series. *Rome: Total War* was originally released in 2004, but Creative Assembly has now decided to update the strategy classic for a new generation as *Total War: Rome Remastered*. We spoke to Kevin McDowell (who was involved with the 2004 original) and Feral Interactive's Tom Massey to find out more.

How did you become involved with the first *Total War* game?

Kevin McDowell: I joined Creative Assembly in early 2000 – they were mostly known for EA-published sports games in those days. At my interview I saw a pre-release version of *Shogun*, it looked right up my alley. In my personal sketchbook I had been doodling ideas of a similarly novel game in which you controlled large groups of soldiers on a 3D battlefield. I've been a fan of Akira Kurosawa for a long time, so the samurai theme was great. The idea in my sketchbook was a Viking Ragnarok game, which I still think would be awesome!

Tom Massey: We've been involved with *Total War* since 2008, when we started work on porting *Rome: Total War* to the Mac. Since then we have released most *Total War* games on that platform and several on Linux. We have also brought *Rome: Total War* to iOS and Android. You could say that we're fans of the series!

Why does it remain so popular?

KM: The Roman theme is a strong one for an empire building war game – there have been few empires to match it. Combine that with the history of Roman martial prowess and the tenacity and variety of their enemies and it's thematically a perfect match. The game itself is the first fully 3D *Total War* game and was technically outstanding when it was released. *Rome: Total War* is very playable and easy on the eye, which creates broad appeal. There is a lot of nostalgia and good will around that game.

» Tom Massey is head of production at Feral Interactive.

TM: People like that time period, it has an enduring appeal. The history of the Roman Empire is well documented, the characters of its leading figures are well-known and their political manoeuvring feels modern. It is accessible to us to a degree that many other periods are not.

Why create a remaster now?

TM: It's been over 15 years since the release of the original. In the interim both game technology and computing power have improved enormously. By taking advantage of this progress, we can offer a much-loved, classic game, but with a modern look and feel that's closer to what players now expect.

How long does a remaster like this take to create?

TM: We have been working on the remaster for about two years, but there was plenty of prep work done before that. So really it's more like three years, all told. The original game is a classic and its gameplay systems have stood the test of time. We wanted to ensure that we retained those fan favourites while at the same time make the significant changes that give the remaster the feel of an authentic update. In order to do that, we had to have a complete understanding of how these systems had been implemented in the original codebase. A lot of time was spent investigating these and ensuring that the changes we wanted to make worked with, or were complementary to the original game. That way the depth, variation and essence of the original still shines through.

Why make the previously unplayable factions playable?

TM: One of the most popular *Rome* mods is to unlock unplayable factions in the campaign. For the mobile versions of *Total War: Rome* we added in any minor missing assets for these factions and made them playable. Players were very appreciative, and it felt like an obvious additional way to make the remaster feel like a true upgrade.

The extra factions add a lot of replayability. There are 16 new factions, each with their own starting point, unit and building rosters and specific challenges. Playing as Numidia or Spain, two of the newly playable factions, for example, sets players down a completely different path to conquest than playing as the Julii.

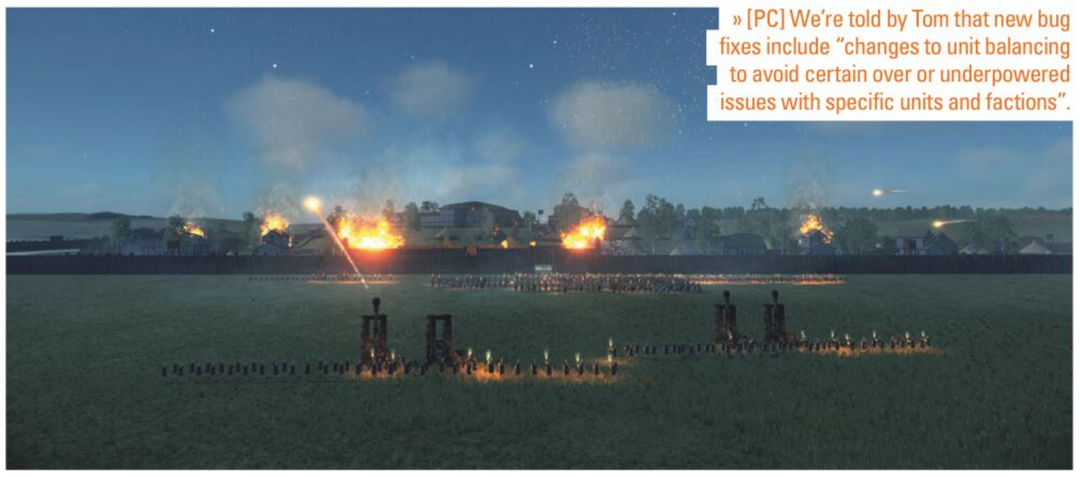
Why are you adding the original expansion packs?

TM: *Rome* is currently sold on Steam as the *Collection* – a complete edition, which includes the base game along

The House of Julii
Early Legionary First Cohort [Heavy Infantry] (52)
Fighting - Victory seems certain. Only a fool could lose this battle
Eager (Spirits lifted by the general's encouragements)
Speed
Time: N/A

» [iOS] Tom and his team have been working on the *Total War* series since 2008.

» [PC] Tom told us that "the remaster presented a golden opportunity to fix a number of long-standing gripes that fans of the original have made known".



» [PC] We're told by Tom that new bug fixes include "changes to unit balancing to avoid certain over or underpowered issues with specific units and factions".

» [PC] Steam features like achievements, workshop and cross-platform multiplayer all feature in the new remaster.

with the two stand-alone expansions, *Barbarian Invasion* and *Alexander*. Given that was the case, we felt that players would expect a remastered version to offer the same content. This also makes the remaster compelling value, especially if you take advantage of the upgrade offer with a Steam key from the original game.

» Kevin McDowell has been involved with the *Total War* series since the early Noughties.

How will you make the remaster accessible to people who don't normally play the genre?

TM: There are two broad areas where we have tried to improve the accessibility to new players: the tutorial and the flow and precision of information in the game. One of the things that puts people off strategy games is the steep learning curve to get to the point where playing is fun. To that end we have overhauled the help system to ease new players into the action and make useful information much more accessible for everyone, regardless of experience. The tutorial has been rewritten from scratch with the intention that playing through it will be a quick refresher for experienced players, while for people who are new to the game and/or genre, it will provide a solid base of understanding, allowing them to get to the fun as quickly as possible.

Ruling an empire and making strategic decisions requires a lot of information, and we wanted to ensure players never felt overloaded. To that end we have introduced a slew of changes to provide information as and when players may need it. The goal has been to provide the right information, in bite-sized pieces, at the right time through extensive multimedia tooltips and new first-time player advice. The manual has also been rewritten and structured as a wiki, accessible from within the game. And finally, all the in-game texts have been extensively edited for clarity and concision, and to reduce repetition and ambiguity.

Why can't you switch between the new and original graphics on the fly like in the recent *Command & Conquer* remaster?

TM: We know this would have been a cool feature, and explored the possibility of including it, however there were significant technical challenges involved in implementing it within an almost 20-year-old engine. As with all games development, we had to balance how we spent our finite resources, so we made a decision to focus our efforts on making the remaster look as impressive as possible without compromise. The good news is that, unlike many other remasters, *Total War: Rome Remastered* includes the original game, so players still have the option to compare the two.

What improvements have you made from a fidelity point of view?

TM: There are several significant improvements. Utilising our new renderer and modern post-processing, the remaster runs beautifully at 4K resolutions, alongside native wide and ultra widescreen support and a redesigned UI to accommodate all those extra pixels. Another aspect of the remaster that's taken a lot of time and effort are the all-new, painstakingly detailed 3D models and textures. While the original looked good for its day, players of the remaster will find it an altogether more arresting and immersive experience. ✱

» [PC] Both expansion packs are included with the new remaster. This is a shot from the original *Alexander* expansion.

» [PC] Numerous quality of life improvements now make it easier to make informed decisions on the campaign map and during battles.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

JUNE 2004 – The summer slump bites, but with two new pieces of hardware due to be revealed at E3, hype for the annual extravaganza has reached fever pitch. Nick Thorpe fires up the time machine once again for a trip to the dawn of a new handheld battle

[GameCube] Many of E3's games were already known, like the big Nintendo exclusive *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*.

NEWS JUNE 2004

Former president of the USA Ronald Reagan passed away on 5 June, at the age of 93. After initially finding fame as an actor, he moved into politics as part of the Republican Party, serving as governor of California from 1967-1975. After an unsuccessful primary challenge against incumbent president Gerald Ford in 1976, Reagan won his party's nomination and ultimately the presidency. From 1981-1989 he implemented new neoliberal economic policies, pushed conservative social policies and increased pressure on the Soviet Union. He had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 1994, and complications from the illness eventually became fatal.

The UK's European Parliament election took place on 10 June, with a 38.5% turnout. Bolstered by the candidacy of former TV presenter Robert Kilroy-Silk, the anti-EU UK Independence Party increased their vote share by 9.1%.

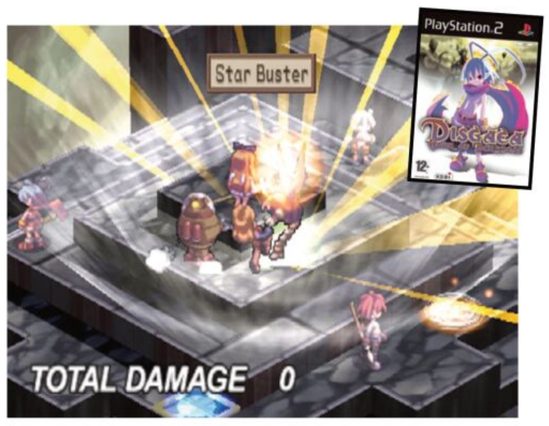
On 24 June, Portugal knocked England out of the Euro 2004 football tournament in the quarter-finals, winning 6-5 on penalties after a 2-2 draw. Michael Owen had put England ahead early, but Wayne Rooney suffered a broken bone in the first half and Helder Postiga evened the score to take the game to extra time, as Sol Campbell had a goal disallowed in the 90th minute. Rui Costa scored and Frank Lampard equalised. Portuguese goalie Ricardo saved Darius Vassell's shot before scoring the winner himself. Portugal would advance to the finals, where they lost to Greece.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 2004

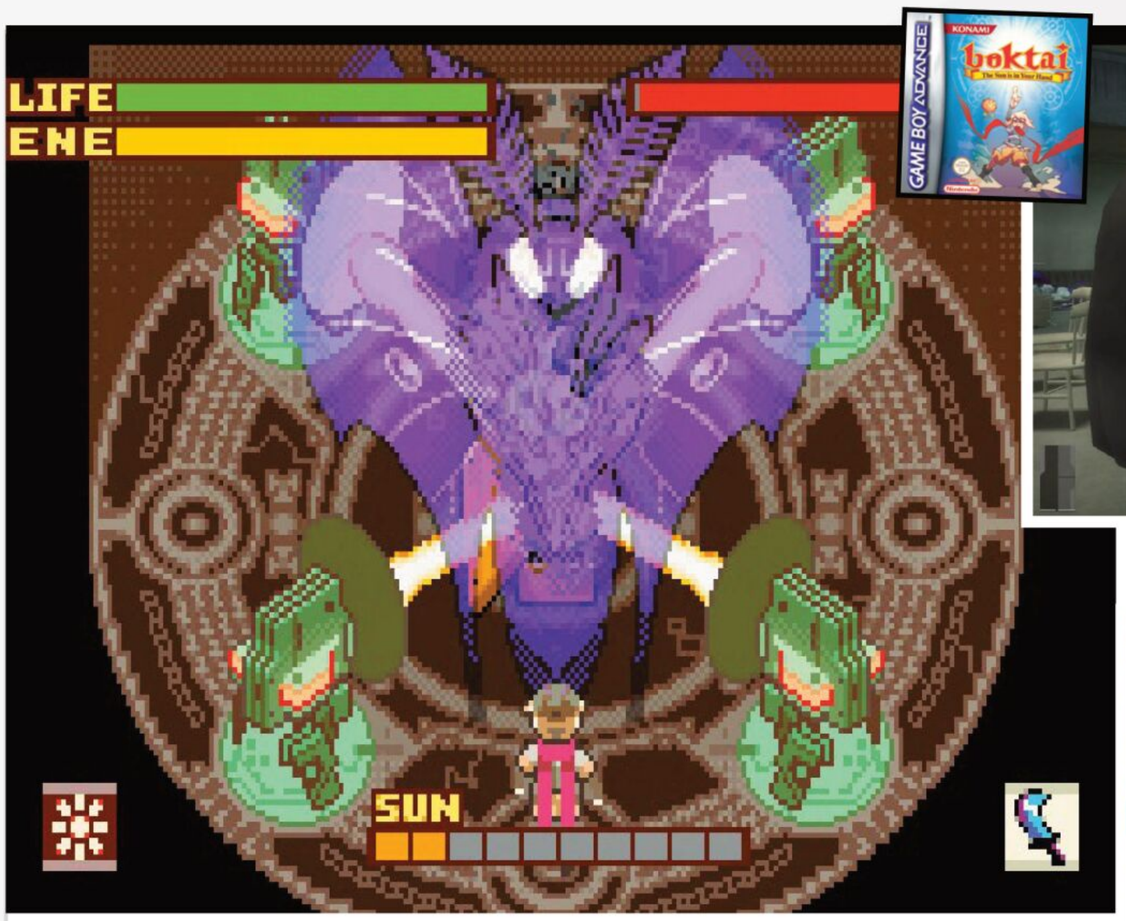
With the assorted members of the UK press making their annual excursion to sunny Los Angeles for an E3 filled with whooping and hollering, crowds and noise, magazines were looking into their crystal balls to see what might be on the horizon. Or, rather, they weren't – as *Edge* admitted that "many publishers divulged details of their E3 wares to us in advance". Non-surprises such as *Metroid Prime 2*, *Devil May Cry 3* and a Live-friendly Xbox conversion of *Doom 3* were all highly tipped to impress, but as *Edge* noted, they "could all be overshadowed by official showings for the PSP and NDS". Feeling rather less restrained, *GamesMaster* offered some bold predictions. Nintendo's DS would retail for £150 and be released by autumn 2004, with a conversion of *Super Mario 64* to be shown at E3. The magazine also claimed that the PSP would launch for £150-£200 during the early part of 2005, that it would be region free for games and capable of downloading films, and that it would be "more powerful than PS2". *GamesMaster* also speculated on two machines not formally confirmed to be at the show. The Xbox 2 would launch around the end of 2005 for £200, and it may or may not come with a hard disk as standard. The PlayStation 3 would come in two models in 2006 – a £130 basic model that "plays games and movies" and a £400-£460 deluxe model with a hard disk and DVD recorder. Both would play PlayStation and PS2 games. The veracity of all of these predictions would be proven with time.

It's a good job that E3 speculation was keeping our gaming pundits busy, because quality software was in short supply this month. The best combination of quality and widespread appeal could be found in the cowboy caper *Red Dead Revolver*, out on PS2 and Xbox. The action-adventure game garnered universal acclaim including scores of 8/10 from *Edge*, 85% from *GamesMaster*, 9/10 from *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, 8.5/10 from *Official Xbox Magazine* and 8/10 from *XBM*. *Edge* said that "Gameplay purists may scowl, but *Red Dead Revolver* is a triumph for beautifully observed atmospherics, characterisation and slapstick set-pieces you cannot fail to enjoy". Why might gameplay purists scowl? *XBM* blamed "some dubious AI and

[PS2] Could a western really hope to make a major splash in gaming? Rockstar certainly hoped so.



[PS2] Fittingly for a game full of big numbers, *Disgaea*'s reviews tended to end with some big numbers.



[GBA] Getting gamers out in the sun – a noble cause, though British weather may cause problems there.

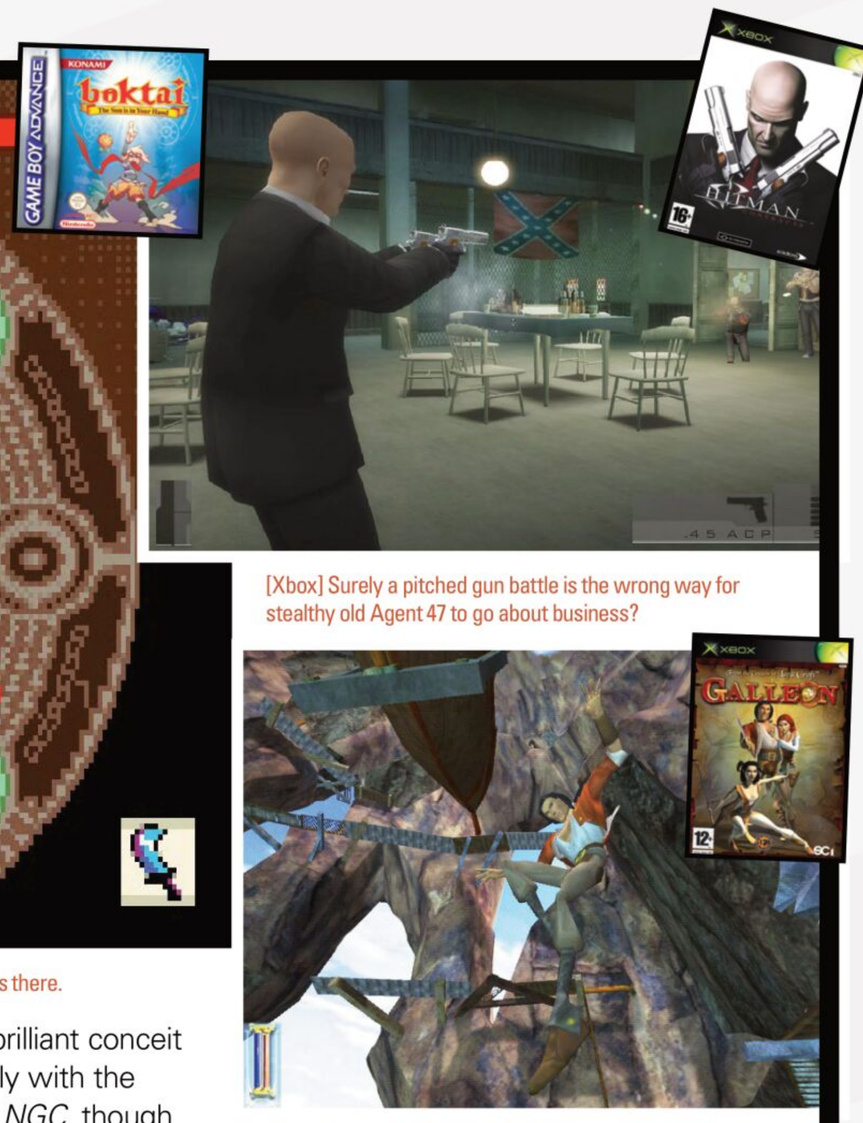
seriously imbalanced boss fights, along with those PS2-style visuals".

But the secret best game of the month might have been the PS2 tactical RPG *Disgaea: The Hour Of Darkness*. "Full frontal, photo-quality nudity in rich and rewarding RPG!" exclaimed *Official PS2 Magazine*, which admitted to lying to draw attention to the review because of the game's "best efforts to turn anyone outside the hardcore RPG brethren off with laughably lo-fi, isometric graphics and an utterly alienating title". Still, it did have silly anime characters in a demon world, and the magazine praised it for possessing "Charm, an imaginative approach and accessibility", scoring it 8/10. It got 90% in *Play* and 88% in *GamesMaster*, too.

With the coming summer months bringing the promise of sunshine, or at least what passes for it in the UK, Game Boy Advance owners could pick up *Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand*. Konami's isometric action-RPG saw you shooting vampires with bullets of sunlight, charged by a solar sensor in the cartridge. "It's a brilliant conceit and it ties in beautifully with the undead theme," said *NGC*, though it noted that "it's possible to use a wealth of stealth tricks to get past the monsters" when night falls. *Boktai* scored 86% in *NGC* and exactly the same in *GamesMaster*. For players hoping for a less innovative experience, SNES platformer port *Donkey Kong Country 2* scored 81% in *NGC*.

Other high profile games were average to good, but not remarkable. *Galleon*, the Xbox action-adventure from *Tomb Raider* creator Toby Gard, scored 7/10 in both *Edge* and *Official Xbox Magazine*, with the latter saying it was "nowhere near as polished as adventures like *Vexx* or *Prince Of Persia*". *Hitman Contracts* on PS2, Xbox and PC scored 7/10 in *Edge* and 84% in *GamesMaster*, which described it as "Not that different to *Hitman 2*, but polished like 47's shiny scalp". PS2 and GameCube sequel *Serious Sam: The Next Encounter* got 7/10 from *Edge* and 8.0/10 from *Cube*, which described the FPS as "fantastically action packed, but shallow". *The Suffering*, a horror FPS for PS2 and Xbox, earned 50% from *Play* and 6/10 from *Edge*, with the latter commenting that "Had the level design been a touch more ingenious, and the creatures exhibited more guile, this could have been memorable". Then there was the surprisingly non-crap film licence *Van Helsing*, which served up a dose of vampire slaying action for PS2 and Xbox. The game earned 70% from *GamesMaster* and the same from *Play*, which said that it "Falls short of *Devil May Cry*'s sheer adrenal action, but avoids falling into the great chasm of money-spinning laziness".

Join us next time for E3's explosion of new things – Nintendo and Sony are bringing their new handhelds, so you'd better bring some enthusiasm. It's the only polite thing to do. ✱



[Xbox] Surely a pitched gun battle is the wrong way for stealthy old Agent 47 to go about business?

[Xbox] After seven years of anticipation and three format changes, *Galleon* arrived to a muted response.

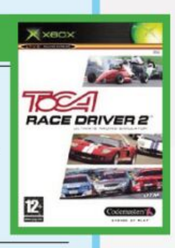
CHARTS

JUNE 2004

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Sonic Heroes (Sega)
2 – James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing (EA)
3 – World Championship Rugby (Acclaim)
4 – This Is Football 2004 (Sony)
5 – LMA Manager 2004 (Codemasters)

XBOX



1 – TOCA Race Driver 2 (Codemasters)
2 – Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow (Ubisoft)
3 – Manhunt (Rockstar)
4 – Unreal II: The Awakening (Atari)
5 – World Championship Rugby (Acclaim)

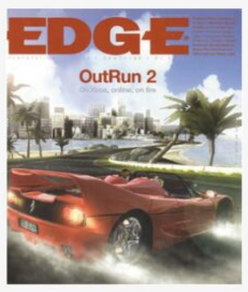
GAMECUBE

1 – Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles (Nintendo)
2 – James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing (EA)
3 – Resident Evil: Code Veronica X (Capcom)
4 – Sonic Heroes (Sega)
5 – Super Smash Bros Melee (Nintendo)

MUSIC

1 – I Don't Wanna Know (Mario Winans ft. Enya and P Diddy)
2 – Come On England (4-4-2)
3 – Dragostea Din Tei (O-Zone)
4 – Trick Me (Kelis)
5 – All Together Now 2004 (Farm ft. SFX Boys Choir)

THIS MONTH IN...



EDGE

Rick Dickinson, former product designer for Sinclair Research, shares his thoughts on the current crop of games machines. "I don't know if I'd have done any better with N-Gage," he admits. The PS2 is slammed as "Bloody crap, really" and the Game Boy Advance SP apparently "reeks of sophistication". And the Commodore 64? "Just grim".

CUBE

"Has Nintendo lost it?" *Cube* was clearly feeling gloomy – Nintendo's fortunes seemed to be fading, and the magazine felt that the company itself was to blame. "Apart from letting the quality and quantity of their games slip Nintendo has also failed to make good on their promise to introduce a number of completely new franchises to the GameCube."

XBM

Frustrated writers chart the broken promises of E3 past, with *Halo 2*, Lionhead's *Fable* and the ill-fated *BC* singled out for special scrutiny. "We tried never to give a release date on *Fable*, but during every press interview the question always comes up," said Peter Molyneux. "When you start a project as big as this, imagining its end is just impossible."

OXYGEN

Seaquest

DOES EXACTLY WHAT IT SAYS ON THE BOX

» ATARI 2600 » 1983 » ACTIVISION

One of the things I loved about visiting Andrew Bacon's house after school was browsing through his impressive Atari 2600 collection. We didn't always get to play on the games themselves because the console was in the front room and they only had one TV, which was typically being used by Andrew's mum. It rarely mattered to me though, because looking at the boxes of videogames back then was almost as much fun as playing them.

Both Atari Inc and Activision had some fantastic art on the covers of their games during this period and I'd love to pick them off the shelf and gaze at the art or simply thumb through their manuals. If I had to choose between the two companies I'd probably go for the abstract style of the Activision games and there was one in particular that always grabbed me – *Seaquest*. The cover of Activision's game was tremendously exciting and featured sharks, submarines, divers and explosions. What was great about *Seaquest* though was that the action found in the game was far more exhilarating than what was promised on the cover, an impressive feat indeed in those days.

While *Seaquest* is a shoot-'em-up at heart, its developer, Steve Cartwright, mixed things up by giving you divers to rescue and a strict air supply to manage. As soon as you descend into the watery depths your air will start ticking down and you'll need to pick up as many divers as you can before it depletes. Returning to the surface with a full sub of divers will net you maximum points and give you a quick breather before the whole frantic rescue mission begins anew.

Don't think you can simply use the surface to avoid the enemy though as Steve cunningly coded the game so that returning with no divers will cause your sub to explode, meaning you may as well try to pick up as many as you can in order to maximise your final score. I've always been a big fan of games that offer some sort of risk vs reward factor and Steve's game is arguably one of the earliest that left a big impression on me. Needless to say, when we were able to play the Atari on the big TV, Steve's game was always the one I tended to pick first. ✱

A TRIBUTE TO

TREASURE

GUNSTAR HEROES SAW TREASURE HIT THE GROUND RUNNING AND THE TALENTED JAPANESE DEVELOPER FOLLOWED IT WITH A STRING OF GAMES THAT WERE AS FUN AS THEY WERE TECHNICALLY ACCOMPLISHED. TREASURE'S PRESIDENT, MASATO MAEGAWA TAKES THIS OPPORTUNITY TO HIGHLIGHT THE STUDIO'S GREATEST AND MOST INTERESTING GAMES

WORDS BY NICK THORPE & DARRAN JONES
INTERVIEW BY JONTI DAVIES

The Mega Drive had no shortage of exciting development teams during the late-Eighties and early-Nineties, but in our opinion, few studios could match the technical brilliance and sheer consistency of Treasure. The studio was started by Masato Maegawa on 19 June 1992 and delivered one hell of a calling card with *Gunstar Heroes* – an outrageously good run-and-gun game that was as inventive as it was technically polished.

Treasure's proficiency on the 16-bit system makes a lot more sense when you realise that Maegawa and his team, which numbered some 18 staff by late 1993, had all previously worked at Konami, and many were accomplished programmers who had worked on such arcade hits as *Qix* and *The Simpsons* as well as SNES classics like *Axelay* and *Super Castlevania IV*. After spending four years at Konami Maegawa revealed to Gamefan in its eleventh issue that "I just couldn't stand making more sequels, but in order to drive sales sequels must always be made".

There was no interest from Konami when Maegawa and his team pitched *Gunstar Heroes*, so he did the next logical thing and left the company to form his own so that he and his fellow programmers could make the games they wanted to play. A partnership was eventually formed with Sega and *Gunstar Heroes* was released to great acclaim – not bad for a game completed in roughly ten months by just seven people. After selling over 70,000 copies in Japan and over 200,000 overseas it could have been easy for Maegawa and his team to simply make a follow-up, but the studio stayed true to its word and continued to create brand-new games. In fact, it wouldn't be until 2004 that Treasure would make a sequel to one of its own games (the Saturn's *Guardian Heroes*) and a sequel to *Gunstar Heroes* arrived the following year.

While Treasure would stay exclusive to Sega consoles for several years, 1997 saw the developer begin to branch out to other machines, although interestingly, many of Treasure's games like *Mischief Makers* (N64), *Guardian Heroes* (Saturn), and *Rakugaki Showtime* (PlayStation) were exclusive to the system in question and weren't converted to other consoles. Treasure even moved briefly into arcade development with the acclaimed shoot-'em-ups *Radiant Silvergun* and *Ikaruga* but it predominantly remained a console developer.

Despite numerous great games, Treasure certainly wasn't bulletproof and has made the odd fumble over the years, most notably with titles like *Freak Out*, *Dragon Dive: D-Masters Shot* and *Silpheed: The Lost Planet* (the first sequel the developer would work on). And yet the early brilliance of the company could easily be found in the likes of *Astro Boy: Omega Factor*, *Gradius V* and *Bangai-O Spirits*. Ironically, burgeoning development costs and the general nature of the videogame industry meant that many of Treasure's later games would be licensed or sequels, the latter of which Maegawa and his team had bullishly avoided for so long. Treasure's last original IP was *Ikaruga* (2001), which in recent years, has been released on modern consoles as well as the PC.

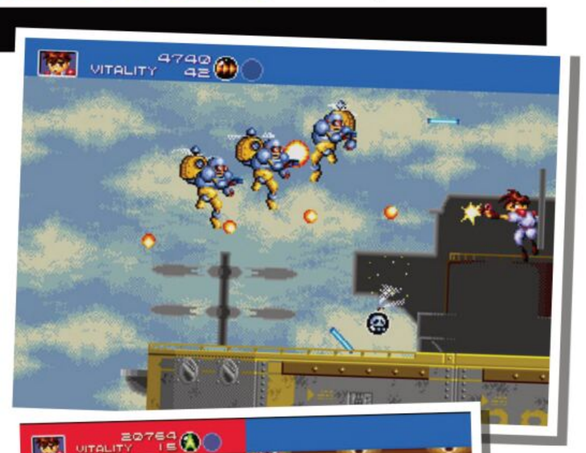
It's unclear if we'll ever see any new games from Treasure (its last release was *Gaist Crusher God* in 2014), but what is clear is the legacy of eclectic and often sensational games that the company has crafted over the past three decades. So join us then as we look back at every game in Treasure's diverse catalogue with curated picks from Treasure's very own Masato Maegawa.

MASATO MAEGAWA

» Treasure's president was originally at Konami where he worked on many popular games. He formed Treasure in 1992 and still oversees it today.

GUNSTAR HEROES

MEGA DRIVE, 1993

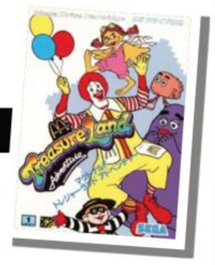


Few debuts have impressed as much as Treasure's eponymous run-and-gun. Not only is it a technical showcase of just what is possible on Sega's 16-bit console, it also features gameplay mechanics that are just as accomplished as its stunning aesthetics. No idea in *Gunstar Heroes* is too bold to try, no boss design too outrageous to include. There's a charming kitchen-sink approach to Treasure's game but it works beautifully. The end result is a dazzling, fast-paced shooter that constantly throws curveballs and continually impresses you with its sheer creativity.

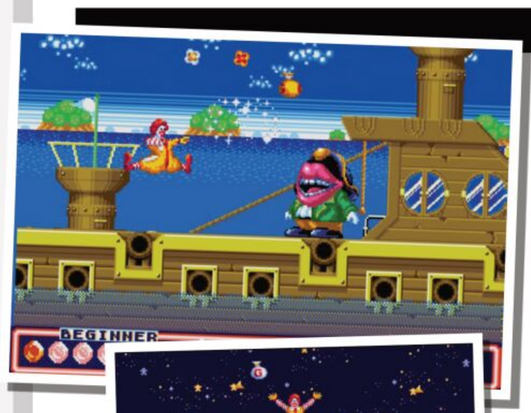
MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"With *Gunstar Heroes*, we decided just to go all out and make the action game of our dreams. It was really a case of anything goes! We used our imagination to realise functions that weren't actually featured in the Mega Drive hardware, such as the polygonal Treasure logo, the rotating title logo and the multi-jointed appearance of Seven Force."

MCDONALD'S TREASURE LAND ADVENTURE



MEGA DRIVE, 1993

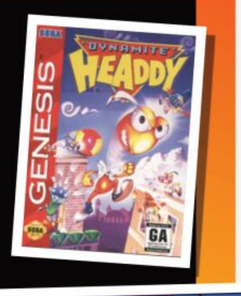


Upon forming Treasure, Maegawa split his staff into two teams: one group worked on *Gunstar Heroes*, the others created this charming platformer. Despite the odd nature of its licence, *Treasure Land Adventure* proves to be an enjoyable romp and has just enough inventiveness and technical prowess to make it obvious who the developer is. It's perhaps the least challenging game Treasure made for Sega's console, but that's to be expected when you consider the target audience.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"The boss characters were originally going to eat hamburgers, but we were told not to treat McDonald's burgers with such disrespect, so instead the bosses ended up as these weird gem-eating characters. Anyway, we packed in as many interesting ideas as we could, including a rotating, scaled Treasure logo. Actually, if you enter a secret password the password entry screen itself turns into a polygonal display."

DYNAMITE HEADDY



MEGA DRIVE, 1994

While Treasure was more than happy to tackle conventional genres, it often found ways to subvert them, whilst showing off its technical skills at the same time. *Dynamite Headdy* is one such game and it turns the platform genre on its head by giving your main character plenty of new ones. Mastering the 18 different noggins Headdy can collect is the secret to success and you'll typically have to use them to best the game's outrageously designed bosses that range from a mechanical toy dog to a gargantuan robot baby head. It all amounts to a polished jewel that's as challenging as it is eccentric.

HEAD'S UP!

A selection of Headdy's bonces and how they affect him

PIG HEAD
This porcine transformation lets Headdy shoot out stars from his snout that will then track down any nearby enemies. It can fire continuously too.

BOMB HEAD
This one-use head has the ability to kill all on-screen enemies, but there is a downside. If Headdy doesn't throw it fast enough he'll lose a life.

SUPER HEAD
This useful noggin not only grants Headdy super speed but lets him jump higher and throw his head further as well, which is very handy.

AIR HEAD
This noodle is only used in certain sections of the game and grants Headdy the ability to fly. Additionally he can fire out bullets in three directions.

EMPTY HEAD
This coconut turns our hero Headdy completely transparent. Asides from looking rather cool it also lets the little tyke avoid most attacks for a limited amount of time.

TICKER HEAD
Overwhelmed by enemies? No problem. Simply attach this stylish dome and you can temporarily freeze enemies, allowing you to attack without fear of reprisal.

SLAMMER HEAD
This metallic cranium is rather useful for Headdy as it dramatically increases his attack power. It can also be used to break specific blocks.

LIBERTY HEAD
Based on the statue, this bean will transport Headdy to an entertaining basketball minigame where he has to shoot hoops against a strict time limit.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"In *Dynamite Headdy* we achieved various tricks with the Mega Drive hardware, including rotation on the X, Y and Z axis, background overwriting and background layering. The silly Maruyama character was said to not look like a bad guy, so we changed him into a scary character for the overseas version."

YU YU HAKUSHO MAKYO TOITSUSEN

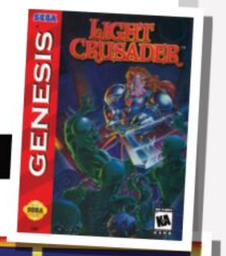
MEGA DRIVE, 1994

This is Treasure's least known Mega Drive game, largely because (aside from Brazil) it was never released outside of Japan. Even though it lacks the aesthetic verve found in earlier Treasure games it nonetheless bristles with ingenuity, offering brawls that cater for up to four players, as well as the ability to jump between planes (something the studio would revisit with its later brawler, *Guardian Heroes*). It's not as easily accessible as other Treasure games due to the multilayered combat and Japanese menus, but it's certainly worth persevering with and the large number of game modes means it offers plenty of longevity.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"This was actually an original game of ours called *Senjutsu Kakuto Axion*, but we ended up transforming it into a different game with the *Yu Yu Hakusho* cast of characters. Our main programmer is a fan of the Hiei character, so we were able to make our version of Hiei look like the real thing. The concept was to make a four-player fighting game with simple controls. During our work breaks at that time, everyone who worked at Treasure would get together and battle it out on this game."

LIGHT CRUSADER



MEGA DRIVE, 1995

Bland is perhaps the best way to sum up Treasure's final Mega Drive game. While it offers an eye-catching isometric viewpoint at times and some gigantic and detailed bosses, its imprecise combat mechanics and slow pace makes it feel a world away from Treasure's other Mega Drive releases. *Light Crusader* makes a decent attempt of straddling genres, including platforming, puzzle-solving and action-based combat, but it doesn't blend them quite as well as earlier Treasure games. A rare misfire.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"*Light Crusader* came about because we wanted to try making an isometric game on Mega Drive. We used 16 or more colours to draw the goddess statues that act as save points, and I think they're really beautiful. I can still remember being shocked by how good they looked the first time I saw them on-screen."

ALIEN SOLDIER

MEGA DRIVE, 1995

All the technical wizardry that Treasure learned while coding for Sega's 16-bit console is put to the test with *Alien Soldier*. It's an astonishing showcase of what Sega's machine is capable of and constantly pushes the hardware with its dazzling display of pyrotechnics. Its difficulty is just as monumental as its visuals and you'll need nerves of steel and an intimate understanding of Epsilon-Eagle's abilities if you expect to run the gauntlet of inventive bosses on a single credit. It might just be a glorified boss rush, but what a boss rush it is.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"*Alien Soldier*'s Seven Force boss [which originally appeared in *Gunstar Heroes*] only has five variations here, but really we wanted to call it 'Seventy Force' and have it transform into 70 different variations, which would have been an absurd specification. But unfortunately time was against us, with the development of *Alien Soldier* cut short by the arrival of the Sega Saturn. Anyway, the concept of this game was to pack it full of multi-jointed bosses, with 100 bosses appearing in succession. The opening demo hints at the full detail of the world and scenarios we were planning, but in-game this was mostly cut, and we only returned to and explored this world concept in full in *Sin & Punishment*."

ALIEN SOLDIER FACT FILES

Cool stuff about Treasure's cult game

1 *Alien Soldier* had a lengthy development cycle for a Treasure game and took over two years to make.

2 Its producer, Hideyuki Suganami was heavily invested in its creation and originally intended to make it on his own.

3 Interestingly, Treasure's game never received a physical release in the US and was instead made available on the Sega Channel.

4 This has probably led to it being one of Treasure's most coveted Mega Drive releases. PAL copies can reach £300 while Japanese versions go even higher.

5 If £300+ is too steep, *Alien Soldier* is readily available on numerous formats, along with *Gunstar Heroes*, *Dynamite Headdy* and *Light Crusader*.

GUARDIAN HEROES

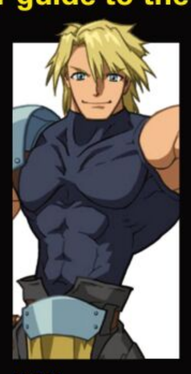
SATURN, 1996

Treasure's highly anticipated first step into the 32-bit generation was a triumphant one, as the developer made a beat-'em-up unlike any other. As well as offering huge battles, the game includes RPG elements which allow you to develop your character, and multiple story paths with a variety of different endings. The Xbox 360 version ups the ante with an arcade mode and online play.

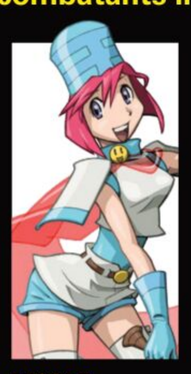
MEET THE TEAM

Your guide to the combatants in Guardian Heroes

GINJIROU
What would this adventuring party be without a ninja? Less verbose probably, as he loves to wax philosophical. When he goes to kick some ass, he's a master of speedy attacks.



HAN
This meaty mercenary has a personality almost as large as his sword. He's not flashy and he's not a particularly effective magic user, but Han gets the job done when brawn is required.



NICOLE
You wouldn't believe she's a fighter at first glance, or second for that matter. But she'll put a smile on your face, and all over your screen, if you learn her – she's just that type of woman.

RANDY
This teenage mage has a rabbit and a curse – he's the straight man to a group of oddballs. Effective use of Randy requires some skill, so he might not be the best choice for a beginner.

SERENA
She's the balanced choice and a fine foil for Han, but Serena's not available during your first run of the game. To find out why, you're just going to have to roll your sleeves up and get stuck in.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"We managed to create a six-person fighting action game with the Sega Saturn version, while the Xbox Live Arcade version that's still available for download raises the bar to 12-person battle play. Playing with a large number of people is always fun. I love the chaotic scenes where it's difficult to even locate your own character. When the game was originally released, everyone in the videogame media was asking us to tell them the correct character configurations, but the correct way to enjoy *Guardian Heroes* is to play by your own rules."

MISCHIEF MAKERS

N64, 1996

Treasure's first venture away from Sega's consoles was an unusual game in many ways. The central mechanic of grabbing things in order to shake, throw and otherwise manipulate them was quite distinctive at the time – as was the visual appearance of the game, with the slightly unnerving faces everywhere. *Mischief Makers*' 2D game design wasn't too fashionable at the time and the game was somewhat overlooked by both critics and players as a result, but the game is well worth revisiting today.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"At first the development environment just wasn't there, and trying to make a 2D game with the unfamiliar 3D development environment of the N64 caused us all kinds of difficulties – and that's why we called the Japanese version of the game *Troublemakers*! Still, we had a lot of fun creating unique gimmicks for each stage. The *gattai* [combination/coalescence] of the multi-jointed bosses is definitely a highlight."

SILHOUETTE MIRAGE

SATURN, 1997/PLAYSTATION, 1998

In a world where everyone has been mutated into polarised silhouette or mirage forms, Shyna is the only one who can set things right. Actually, that should be left *and* right, since her attacks are also polarised based on the direction she's facing – a theme that Treasure would later revisit. It's another very good game, but the North American PlayStation version published by Working Designs features some major changes from the Japanese version, including a higher difficulty level.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"When we started planning *Silhouette Mirage*, the idea was to make ghosts appear if you continued using only one type of attack. We thought we could make a more interesting type of action game with the idea of switching between different attributes depending on whether the character was facing left or right, but it took a lot of work to achieve this without making the controls too tricky or complicated."

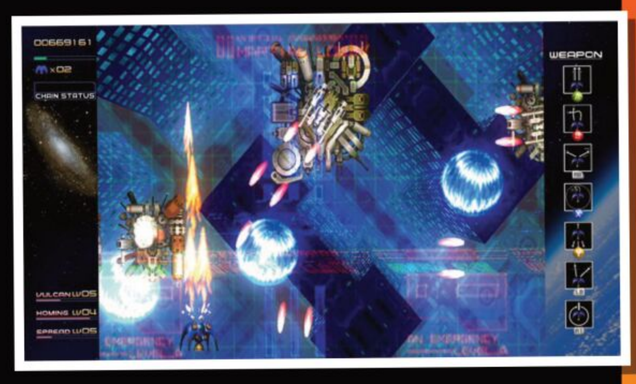
RADIANT SILVERGUN

ARCADE/SATURN, 1998

If you could only describe one Treasure game as legendary, *Radiant Silvergun* would surely have to be it. It's legendary for its unique design, which ditches power-ups and instead encourages you to enhance a wide range of standard weaponry by shooting down enemies in colour combinations. It's legendary for extracting maximum performance from Sega's notoriously complex Saturn hardware. Thanks to high demand, the Saturn version is also legendarily expensive. Thankfully, the game was re-released digitally for Xbox 360 in 2011 and works on modern Xbox consoles via backwards compatibility.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

Radiant Silvergun is full of homages. If you know what we're parodying, you won't be able to help laughing. I think the last boss in particular, XIGA, is really playful and imaginative. The concept was always about combining puzzle elements with shooting. As an arcade game it was arguably too long for a single play through, so we cut some of the stages.



LOST IN TRANSLATION

How the arcade version of Radiant Silvergun was maimed for the West

If you're going to buy an original copy of *Radiant Silvergun*, it's probably the Saturn version, but you may find yourself tempted to pick up an ST-V arcade cartridge. However, a nasty surprise potentially awaits those that take this alternative route as *Radiant Silvergun* requires a Japanese BIOS to work properly. While the game will start up and play just fine, the control scheme is reduced to just two buttons, leaving you without access to most of the weaponry that you're supposed to have. Fortunately, the cartridge is not region locked, so a Japanese ST-V motherboard or a modded BIOS will solve this problem for you.

RAKUGAKI SHOWTIME

PLAYSTATION, 1999

Treasure's only PlayStation exclusive features scribbled characters battling each other in a 3D arena, which inevitably draws comparisons with Capcom's *Power Stone*, but the act of throwing objects is far more important in *Rakugaki Showtime*. It's quite expensive now, but did get a PlayStation Network digital release in Japan.

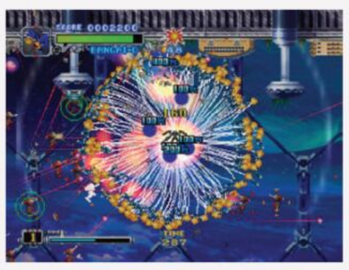
MAEGAWA MEMORIES

You can actually play *Rakugaki Showtime* on a 'super' difficulty setting that can be unlocked by entering a poke [on the title screen hold L1 + R2 + Select + Left + Triangle + X for ten seconds until you hear an explosion, and repeat this twice to find 'super' as an option in the unlocked stage select mode], and this is how we originally intended it to be played. In four-player mode, not being able to keep track of what's going on is part of the fun! I think it's cool that rather than aiming for detailed, beautiful graphics, we went down the road of *rakugaki* [scribbles] and paper.

BANGAI-O

N64/DREAMCAST, 1999

They say that size matters, and *Bangai-O* certainly proves that. You take control of a flying mech suit which can fire in eight directions, with the goal of taking out enemies and bosses. All of these are far smaller than you'd expect, but that's all in service of packing more stuff onto the screen – enemies have plenty of firepower, and you have a counterattack that responds to the proximity of enemy fire, spewing out potentially hundreds of missiles. Add some very bizarre dialogue and characters, and you've got a ready-made cult favourite.



MAEGAWA MEMORIES

To begin with this was just a pure action game, but it suddenly became a shooting game when we implemented the idea of firing bullets. Then the concept became a challenge to ourselves, to see how many bullets we could draw on-screen! I think the edit mode and the 'sound load' function of the DS version, *Bangai-O Spirits*, are also really interesting ideas.

GUNBEAT

ARCADE, CANCELLED (2000)

Treasure's first game to be cancelled after announcement was destined for Sega's NAOMI arcade board. *GunBeat* made limited appearances at trade shows and location tests, but today only images and video footage remain, with no playable version of the game available officially or otherwise.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

Our plan for *Gunbeat* was to combine racing and explosive shooting action in an arcade game, but to be honest it just wasn't much fun to play, so we abandoned the project. Sad to say, the only thing we completed was the opening movie.

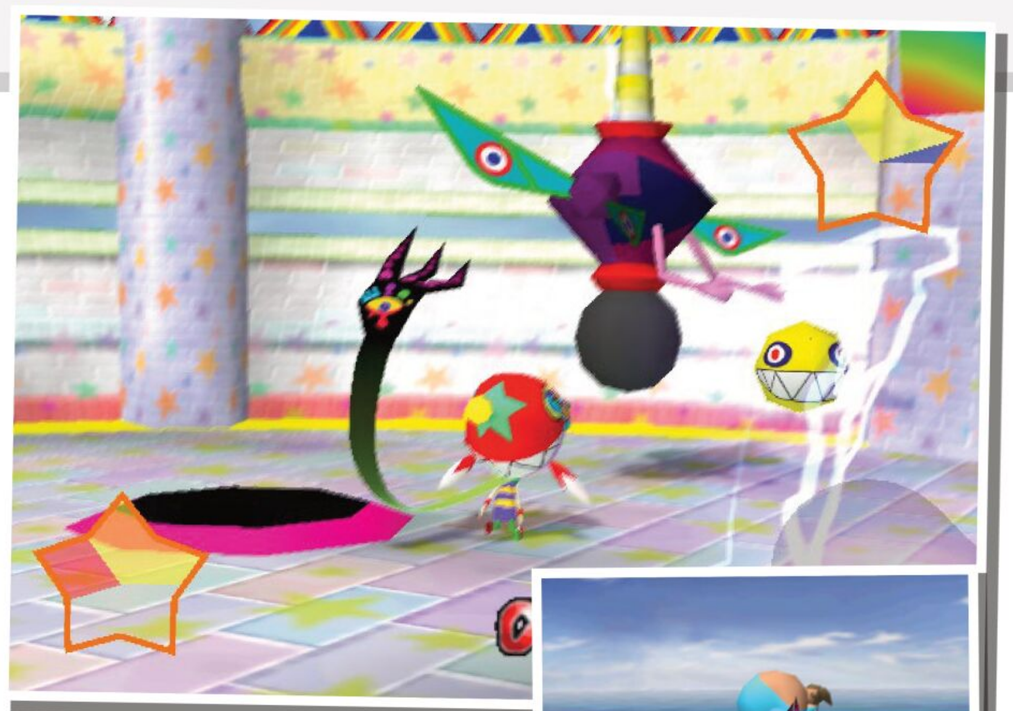
SILPHEED: THE LOST PLANET

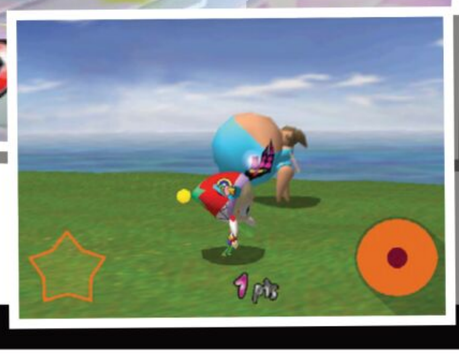
PS2, 2000

Few people likely expected Treasure to create a sequel to Game Arts' fondly remembered shoot-'em-up – and unfortunately, this early PS2 effort isn't quite as memorable as the original, or indeed Treasure's other efforts in the genre. It was an impressive sight to behold at the time, with some very exciting real-time 3D backgrounds rather than the pre-rendered ones used in the Mega-CD game. The gameplay is solid enough but rather basic, and the difficulty is fairly low on the default setting.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"The original concept with *Silpheed* was to present life forms in a unique way on the Dreamcast, but one day we suddenly decided to remake the game for PlayStation 2. From the outset we were producing a huge amount of storyboards and I remember that we were holding meetings every week to direct the production."

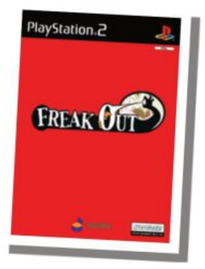




FREAK OUT

PS2, 2001

Treasure has never been averse to the absurd and bizarre, but this 3D action game is arguably the company's weirdest game. Linda's 12 sisters have been possessed by demons, and she'll have to fight all of them as bosses in order to save them. Her key power is her possessed scarf, which can be used to grab and stretch enemies and the environment, allowing for pinching attacks and slingshot jumps. *Freak Out* (or *Stretch Panic* in the US) looks and feels unique, but it tends to divide opinion – though if you do fancy trying it, copies are cheap and plentiful.



MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"Our initial plan was to implement gimmicks using shadows, and not just the idea of pulling, but unfortunately the shadow feature had to be cut because we received feedback saying that the action would become too complicated and difficult to grasp. But I still want to try it out someday."

SIN & PUNISHMENT

N64, 2000

This 3D shoot-'em-up is arguably the most essential import game in the N64 library, featuring spectacular graphics and non-stop action. *Sin & Punishment* plays similarly to the likes of *Cabal* – you control a character in the foreground, and dodge left and right to avoid incoming fire while shooting into the screen at enemies. The ability to move and aim simultaneously, as well as the 3D stages, are what set it apart from older takes on this style of shooter.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"Originally this was going to be called *Glass Soldier*, as it had intricate links with *Alien Soldier*. The concept was built up around using the N64 controller's left position, and it's really difficult to control like that, so we were looking at implementing an aiming function in the Controller Pak, but unfortunately that never came to pass. However, in the sequel this was easy to realise using the Wii Remote."

JOURNEY TO THE WEST

How Sin & Punishment finally made its international debut

With English voice acting, *Sin & Punishment* never felt destined to remain in Japan alone.

Nintendo announced an E3 2001 showing, but the game never made the show floor.

In 2004, the game was translated into Chinese and released for the iQue Player.

The game was finally released in English via the Wii Virtual Console service in 2007.

Its Wii U debut was in 2015, and it's the only way to buy the English version today.

TINY TOON ADVENTURES: BUSTER'S BAD DREAM

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2002

This scrolling beat-'em-up might be a surprise to many of you. You take control of Buster Bunny, pick a partner – each with different abilities, of course – and then try to fight your way through a nightmare filled with hostile creatures. It's tougher than you'd expect for a game that would be ostensibly aimed at kids, but the bigger surprise is the combat design, filled with combos, knock-back attacks launchers and special attacks. It's a bit repetitive and simple in structure, but players of *Astro Boy: Omega Factor* can easily see how this design forms the basis for the more celebrated game.

SCARY REALITY

The strange story of the North American version

There are very few differences between the European and North American versions of this game – a different title necessitates a different title screen and, obviously, packaging too. The game was finished and ready to go in 2002 yet the American release remained on ice for years, only eventually emerging in limited quantities in 2005, by which time the Game Boy Advance had been succeeded by the DS. The packaging and title screens still bore their 2002 copyright dates, too. So what exactly happened here? Nobody quite knows for sure – common theories suggest a publishing problem with Conspiracy Entertainment, most likely that it had lost the licence before it could go to market. It's highly likely, however, that whatever caused this incident probably had a lot to do with the cancellation of Treasure's other *Tiny Toons* project with the same publisher.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"This title wasn't even released in Japan, but it was produced by our *Bangai-O* team. Actually, the original *Bangai-O* was a collaborative action game like *Buster's Bad Dream*. I think it's a cool title full of interesting systems such as the partner character system and continuous combos."

IKARUGA

ARCADE, 2001/DREAMCAST, 2002/GAMECUBE, 2003

By taking the weapon polarisation of *Silhouette Mirage* and the enemy chaining of *Radiant Silvergun*, Treasure created one of the most revered shoot-'em-ups of all time. *Ikaruga* doesn't just play well, though – as your ship majestically swoops through the air to a stirring soundtrack, it's clear that the presentation is top notch too. It's on Xbox, PS4, Switch and PC these days, so don't miss out.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"We took the prototype of *Ikaruga* to many different publishers but no one wanted to release it, so in the end we decided to make it a self-published Treasure release. With *Ikaruga* I feel we took the puzzle and shooting style of *Radiant Silvergun* as far as it could go. If you could play *Ikaruga* in slow-motion, it would be the definition of a puzzle game! The one tricky part of development was that we struggled to assemble a team of testers because not everyone was capable of bug-checking the game."

TINY TOON ADVENTURES: DEFENDERS OF THE UNIVERSE

PS2/GAMECUBE, CANCELLED (2002)

The second known example of buried Treasure was very similar in gameplay terms to *Rakugaki Showtime*, but with the likes of Buster Bunny and Plucky Duck lobbing balls at each other. The reason for the project's cancellation has never been revealed, but a playable version of the game has been circulating for years now.

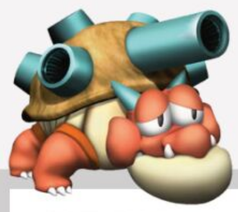
HAJIME NO IPPO: THE FIGHTING!

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2002

You may not be aware of this boxing manga, but it's a real staple of the scene in Japan – it has been running since 1989. While this might look like a certain other popular boxing game, there's actually quite a bit more going on in this nifty Japanese exclusive. You have quite a few more defensive options to go with the one button punching system, and range matters as some fighters have better reach than others.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"This plan came about because some of our development team members were huge fans of *Hajime No Ippo*. In fact, they used to keep the entire collection of *Hajime No Ippo* manga here at the Treasure offices. The strategy in the game is taken straight from the boxing concept of 'wait for an attack, dodge it, and then attack'. Countering is the key element of the game, just as it is in the manga."



WARIO WORLD

GAMECUBE, 2003

You can never keep Wario away from a treasure hunt for long, so it makes sense that Treasure was the team to give Mario's greedy rival his first 3D platform outing. Plenty of the charm you'd expect is there, as it's a nice-looking game with some decidedly old-school platforming sensibilities, with plenty of hidden hauls of gold to pick up. Unfortunately, for all of *Wario World*'s good points, it is a very short game that garnered criticism for being repetitive – a word not normally used to describe Treasure's earlier games.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"We made the Japanese version of *Wario World* after the overseas edition had been released, so we took the opportunity to make various changes. For example, the main programmer was particularly attached to the last boss, so for the Japanese version we did a remake. Really we wanted to make the game a bit bigger and pack in some extra features, but there was only so much we could do."

DRAGON DRIVE: D-MASTERS SHOT

GAMECUBE, 2003

This Japan-only release is a videogame adaptation of a manga about a fictional videogame in which people battle with virtual dragons. Got that? Good. It's a 3D shooting game with some on-rails areas similar in style to *Panzer Dragoon* and some open areas closer to *Zone Of The Enders*, both of which task you with destroying other dragons, as well as duels with bosses. Power-ups appear in the form of cards, which can be activated using the D-pad. Sadly it just isn't as compelling as it could be – the visuals are only OK, and the stages aren't tremendously exciting.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"From the beginning we had been planning to produce a 3D shooting game, so it was quite fortuitous that the opportunity arose to work with such a perfectly suited property as *Dragon Drive*. Development wasn't all smooth sailing – we had some problems, including the absence of our main programmer – but we got there in the end."

ASTRO BOY: OMEGA FACTOR

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2003

Though it includes some light platforming and shoot-'em-up elements, this licensed game is more beat-'em-up than anything else. With vast hordes of enemies to tackle, you'll quickly realise that Astro Boy's special attacks aren't to be jealously hoarded, but deployed frequently and quickly rebuilt with punches and kicks.

The imaginative and often technically marvellous boss battles are a highlight of the game, as is the time-travel twist that kicks in just when you think you know exactly how the game is going to play out. It's one of the very best games for the GBA.

TEZUKA WORLD

This cast goes beyond Astro Boy – let's trace their origins

SHARAKU

This antagonistic chap originates from *The Three-Eyed One*, which ran from 1974-1978. He's normally not a bad chap, unless you remove his bandage and reveal his third eye – which gives you an idea of the role he plays here.

BLACK JACK

One of Tezuka's most famous creations is the best unlicensed doctor you're ever likely to come across – as well as the most expensive. In this game, he serves as an ally to Astro, taking a plot role and nothing else.

PHOENIX

This icon of rebirth stars in *Phoenix*, a manga that Tezuka considered to be his life's work, which he worked on for decades prior to passing away in 1989. She becomes involved in proceedings at an unexpected point in the game.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"This is really an 'Osamu Tezuka World' game. There was someone from Sega always hanging around here during development and we had a lot of intense discussions [laughs]. After releasing the Japanese version we had more time to work on the overseas edition, so that became the definitive version."

GRADIUS V

PS2, 2004

Events have a funny way of shaking out, and Treasure being entrusted with one of Konami's legacy series felt like circumstances coming full circle. *Gradius V* is an excellent entry in the series, with plenty of respect for series traditions as well as something new to offer, in terms of the control that the player has over the option drones. It's also possible to regain your options after death, which is very welcome considering that the game is very tough – but then, *Gradius* always is. It certainly doesn't always look and sound as good as this, though.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"As this was a numbered entry in the famous series, development was enjoyable in some respects and difficult in others. One of our concepts was to introduce weapon edit and option control features. But I think the game itself was a little too long. Also, our work was complicated by the fact that we were opening a third office around the time when we were developing *Gradius V*."

ADVANCE GUARDIAN HEROES

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2004

Treasure's first direct sequel was certainly an ambitious one, bringing the chaotic action of *Guardian Heroes* to the small screen. At times, it seems too much for the handheld to cope with, as the game is prone to frequent bouts of slowdown when everything gets a bit too hectic. However, the depth of the combat system and the sheer scale of the battles are hard to match on the Game Boy Advance, and the classic Treasure set-pieces like the amazing river raft stage are all present and correct. It's not quite a match for the original, but if you've played that to death and you're hungry for more, *Advance Guardian Heroes* is definitely a game you should try.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"*Advance Guardian Heroes* is all about the four-player versus mode. I hope that players will set various rules and enjoy strategic battles with other players using counters. We love countering systems, and that's why they're deployed as the crux of so many of our games."

GUNSTAR FUTURE HEROES

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2005

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree – like its predecessor, *Gunstar Future Heroes* is technically impressive and action-packed. It's even stuffed with more variety if you can believe it, with homages to games like *Flicky* and *After Burner* joining callbacks to the original game. We just wish there was more of it, as the game is a little on the short side.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"I remember building and rebuilding stages over and again. All sorts of stages didn't make the final cut, including one where you had to climb up a waterfall. There was even a 'file crusher' that would delete your save data. It was so funny, but unfortunately we had to cut that because it would go against game production standards. I really regret having to leave that out, though. The Sega game homage stage originally had way more elements, including an homage to *ESWAT* and many other titles, but we couldn't get it completed and in the end many elements were cut."

DELETED SCENES

Maegawa wasn't kidding about how much was cut – here are some examples

- An *Altered Beast* room, as seen in this pre-release screenshot. Unfinished sprites for the dragon are found in the final game, as well as some sprites for the bear.
- Sprites for the *ESWAT* protagonist also appear, though only a few, with no further context provided.
- The *After Burner* track *Final Take Off* was heard in a trailer, yet remains unused despite its section of the game making the final cut.
- Music from many more Sega games can be found in the game's data, including *Altered Beast*, *Super Thunder Blade*, *Galaxy Force II*, *ESWAT* and *Golden Axe*.

BLEACH: THE BLADE OF FATE

DS, 2006

This fighting game is the first of Treasure's three adaptations of this incredibly popular manga series, in which the teenager Ichigo Kurosaki acts as a soul reaper – a guide for souls crossing into the afterlife, and a fighter of dangerous restless spirits called hollows. Up to four characters can take part in fights, making it somewhat reminiscent of *Yu Yu Hakusho*, and players can use the touch screen to activate special cards that have status altering effects during combat. Fans will enjoy the fact that there's plenty of story content, too. It's not one of Treasure's better known games, but it may well surprise you if you give it a try.

SEGA AGES 2500: GUNSTAR HEROES TREASURE BOX

PS2, 2006

While Treasure didn't make this compilation, Maegawa did oversee it. This compilation includes the Mega Drive and Game Gear versions of *Gunstar Heroes*, as well as a hidden prototype version of the Mega Drive game. The title of this one is actually a little bit of a misnomer. *Gunstar Heroes Treasure Box* also features *Alien Soldier* and the Mega Drive, Game Gear and Master System versions of *Dynamite Headdy*, which makes it a rather nice tribute to the studio's 16-bit years. This is the only compilation of Treasure games to date, and benefits from being developed by the emulation experts at M2.

BLEACH: DARK SOULS

DS, 2007

No, not *that Dark Souls*. This follow-up to Treasure's previous *Bleach* game delivers more of the same four-way fighting action, and does everything you'd expect a fighting game sequel to do, adding new moves for the old characters as well as a batch of additional fighters. The number of cards you can bring into battle has also been doubled to four. It's not tremendously different from its predecessor, but that still means that you're getting a high-quality experience, and hardcore followers of the manga and anime will doubtless want to experience it just for the story.

BANGAI-O SPIRITS

DS, 2008

The sequel to *Bangai-O* adds plenty of new weaponry, as well as the ability to knock enemies backwards with melee weapons like the baseball bat, potentially causing a domino effect. It also adds a completely new cast, though there's not much of a story – in fact, one of the characters is admonished in the ending for wanting to trade the game in. That's because Treasure really gave players the keys to the castle here, with a level editor and an innovative 'sound load' feature that enables custom stages to be shared as audio, to be played into the DS microphone. It's really rather good.

THE NEXT LEVEL

Looking for some levels to sound load? We've got you covered

***Bangai-O* Custom Levels Repository**
bit.ly/bangaiocustom

A curated list of stages, with instructional content on how to get the stages working and a variety of links to other resources. It's highly recommended.

***Bangai-O Spirits* Sound Load Vault**
bit.ly/bangaiovault

This is a very comprehensive archive to visit that seemingly aims to compile all custom stages that are available online, including an extremely impressive YouTube directory.

SIN & PUNISHMENT: SUCCESSOR OF THE SKIES

WII, 2009

Set many years after the events of the original game, *Sin & Punishment* casts you as Isa Jo, son of the original game's protagonists Saki and Airan, as he attempts to protect a mysterious girl named Kachi whom he had previously been ordered to kill. *Successor Of The Skies* (or *Star Successor* in North America) takes everything about the original game and turns it up to 11 – it's longer and more challenging, it's more intuitive to play thanks to the use of the Wii controller as a pointer, and it's an absolute audiovisual feast. As Wii exclusives go, it's one of the very best.

MAEGAWA MEMORIES

"We even discussed having a sensor when we were making the N64 game and so, as soon as I saw the Wii Remote, I felt that we had no choice but to make a sequel."

CHOOSE YOUR COMPANION

Isa and Kachi have slightly different capabilities – who should you choose?

ISA

If you're a *Sin & Punishment* veteran or just fancy yourself a steady aim, Isa's the guy to go for. He can dish out more damage with manually aimed shots, and has a superior rate of fire to Kachi. If you take the time to load up a charged shot, Isa will deliver one gigantic targeted blast, which is likely to help you take down bosses with ease.

KACHI

Newcomers may find themselves better placed to deal with the challenge of the game if they pick Kachi. She doesn't lose any power by using auto-lock shots over manual aiming, making it easier to concentrate on dodging incoming fire. Her charged shot is a multi-target homing attack, which can help to clear the screen in hectic moments.

BLEACH: VERSUS CRUSADE

WII, 2008

Unlike Treasure's other *Bleach* games, this one was only released in Japan. Rather than battling on a 2D plane as in the DS games, Ichigo and his compatriots now fight in 3D arenas, with an over-the-shoulder perspective that will be familiar to fans of other anime fighting games like *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi* and *Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm*. It's a decent enough outing, especially if you choose traditional controls over motion controls, and there are plenty of unlockables including many of the 25 characters on the roster. However, it's not quite up to the standard of the DS games.

BANGAI-O HD: MISSILE FURY

XBOX 360, 2011

Treasure's first foray outside of the world of boxed games is also the only time the developer has created a second sequel to one of its original properties. Any pretence of a plot is dropped completely here, and if you're hoping that the HD visuals will aid in clarity, be assured that there's even more on-screen than ever before. *Bangai-O* enthusiasts will have great fun with the dozens of levels provided, but newcomers may struggle a bit with the frequent difficulty spikes. Unfortunately, right now the game hasn't been added to Xbox backwards compatibility, so you'll need a 360 to play it.

GAIST CRUSHER

3DS, 2013

This Japan-only game was intended to be the central pillar of a cross-media franchise, with Capcom publishing the game, and manga and anime adaptations to accompany it. The game itself sees you play as one of the titular gaist crushers, who wear their gaist gear armour to fight the gaimetal-encrusted gaist creatures (that's some strong branding). In practical terms, this means 3D hack-and-slash action with some cool bosses and interesting customisation options. Repetitive stages and some clunky mechanics do somewhat mar the experience, though. If you're thinking about importing it, though, you should really do yourself a favour and read the next entry.

GAIST CRUSHER GOD

3DS, 2014

Treasure's final development to date actually serves a dual purpose – as well as including a whole new story, focusing on the emergence of the more dangerous creatures, *Gaist Crusher God* includes the original game's story and refines the game design to some degree. All of the story mode missions can be played on easy difficulty, and the powerful extreme form attacks can be cancelled mid-way through. Despite the improvements, the repetitive structure of the original game persists, but this is definitely the preferred version to pick up if you're interested in adding it to your collection.

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THE EVOLUTION OF MINER

The chart-topping Miner 2049er received two sequels and was subsequently reimagined for the Game Boy and mobile phones. Its creator Bill Hogue and the mobile update's level designer Erin Martel chart the evolution of the series

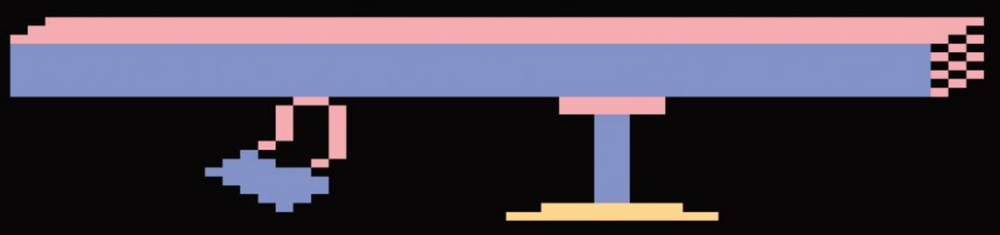
WORDS BY RORY MILNE

BILL HOGUE

» Although too busy right now, Bill Hogue might make another *Miner 2049er* title when he retires.

At the dawn of the Eighties, innovations in coin-op hardware led to character-based videogames that previously hadn't been possible. During this time, game developer Bill Hogue and his colleague Jeff Konyu frequently visited arcades for inspiration, and as Bill explains, three character-driven titles inspired a new project. "Jeff and I were big into playing videogames, and that was where most of the concepts came from for *Miner 2049er*," Bill acknowledges. "It was influenced mostly by *Donkey Kong*, and a little bit of *Crazy Climber* and *Pac-Man*. To finish a level on *Pac-Man* you had to eat all of the dots, and there was the same kind of concept in *Miner*, really, where you had to fill in all of the framework. So we were trying to combine multiple games that we liked to spend quarters on!"

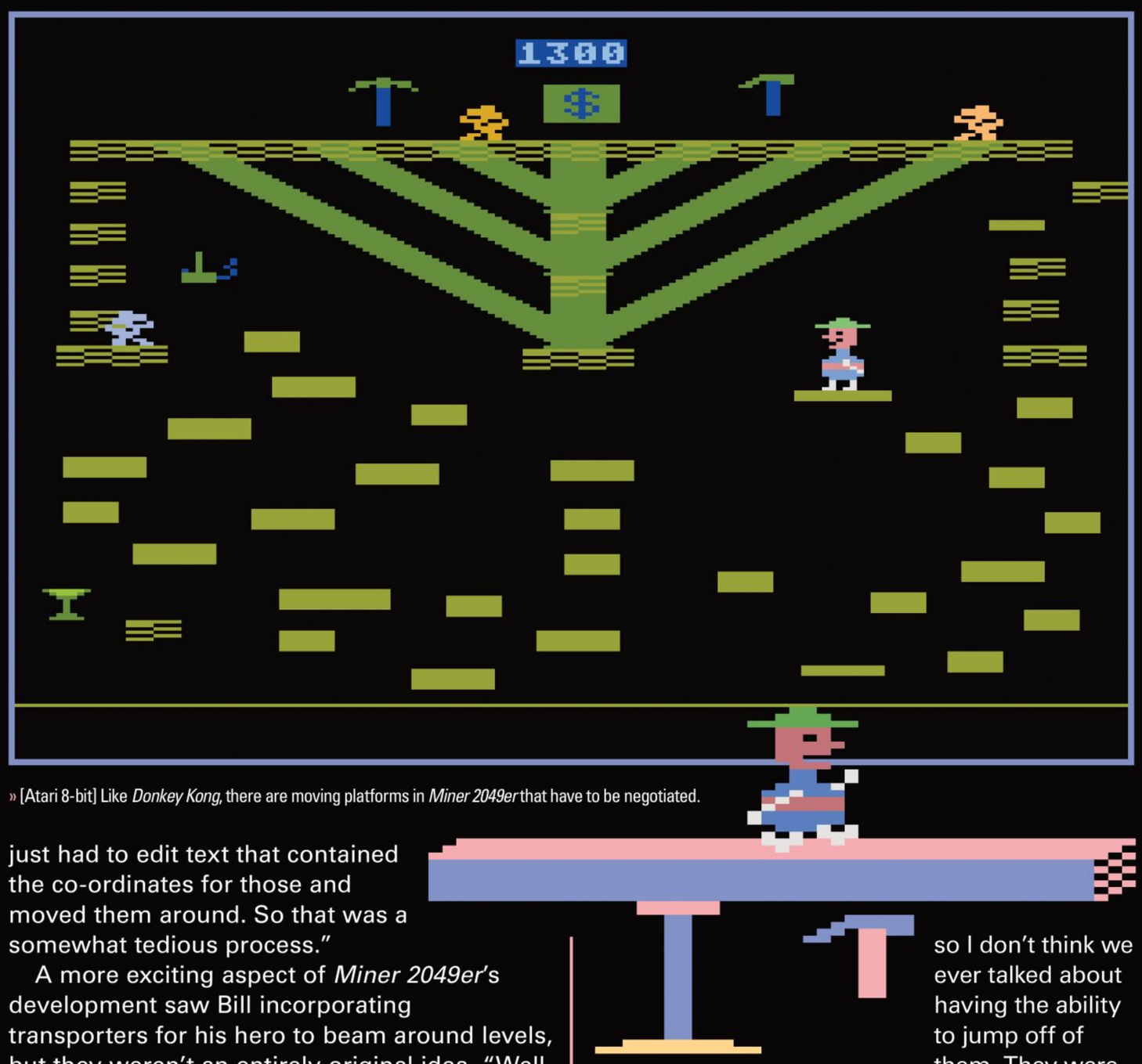
Of course, Bill's latest design needed a hero – who would ultimately become the futuristic miner Bounty Bob, but long before that, Bill created an amusing death sequence for his protagonist. "Bob being smashed down into a hat was pretty interesting!" Bill beams. "I used to watch *Looney Tunes* cartoons when I was a kid, so they could definitely have been an inspiration. It was the same technique when Bob touched something radioactive or exploded. Those were cheap visual tricks using the sprites, where you could stretch them horizontally."



Opponents for Bob came soon after, and given *Miner 2049er*'s coin-op inspirations, it follows that the dynamics between these mutant foes and Bob would echo mechanics from one of Bill's go-to arcade machines. "The mutants were another lift from *Pac-Man*," Bill admits, "where you ate a treat and the ghosts became killable for a little bit of time. But I don't think that when I first started doing *Miner 2049er* that the whole 'miner and the mutants' thing was thought out – the storyline was created after the fact. It was all tied in with the miner 49er [*Oh My Darling, Clementine*] music. We used that, and then we decided that it couldn't be *18*49, so we had to push it into the future a bit."

Long before *Miner 2049er* was given its future setting, however, Bill focused on building up his platformer's gameplay, and one of its innovations came in the form of platforms that moved back and forth across the screen. "The moving platforms were just me trying to come up with things that I could program at the time, and without too much effort," Bill explains modestly. "In *Miner*, all of the platforms that you would step on were all just hard-coded in text, and if we thought they were too hard or too easy we

> "I don't think that when I first started doing Miner 2049er that the whole 'miner and the mutants' thing was thought out – the storyline was created after"
>
> BILL HOGUE



» [Atari 8-bit] Like *Donkey Kong*, there are moving platforms in *Miner 2049er* that have to be negotiated.

just had to edit text that contained the co-ordinates for those and moved them around. So that was a somewhat tedious process."

A more exciting aspect of *Miner 2049er*'s development saw Bill incorporating transporters for his hero to beam around levels, but they weren't an entirely original idea. "Well clearly the transporters were based on *Star Trek*," Bill grins. "Even if you listened to the sound that I was able to come up with for them, it was a little twinkling type of sound; it was like a *Star Trek*-type sound. Not that *Star Trek* had a transporter that transported between levels of the starship, but that's what I was going for, where you disappeared somewhere and showed up somewhere else."

Further transportation devices followed, although the platform-spanning slides that Bill designed for *Miner 2049er* didn't allow stops on the way down to their final destination. "I liked the visual of once you were going down the slide, where you were no longer in control and you were just going to *end up* somewhere," Bill remembers. "The purpose of the slides was to direct you on a path, so I don't think we ever talked about having the ability to jump off of them. They were forcing you to take a certain route, or preventing you from going a certain way."

Another mode of transport made its appearance in *Miner 2049er*'s final level – if you can describe being blown out of a cannon as transport! Its ingenious mechanics involved packing it with enough TNT to explode Bill upwards to a required platform. "The cannon was much like the transporter, it was just an alternate way to get Bob to one of the other platforms," Bill reasons. "Although we wanted to allow you to pick how much TNT you wanted to put in there. So we even let you put more than you needed in and blow yourself off the screen! It was just all evolution, none of those things were thought out ahead of time. But I wanted to be the best of the best, and I was going to take advantage of every last thing I had on the computer."

Bill's comprehensive use of the Atari 8-bit was rewarded with chart-topping sales,

» [Atari 8-bit] You should avoid *Miner 2049er*'s slides after colouring the bits of framework that they pass over.

» [Atari 8-bit] It's fairly obvious that the transporters in *Miner 2049er* are straight out of *Star Trek*.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

MODES OF TRAVEL

SLIDES, BALLOONS, SUCTION TUBES AND RADIOACTIVE ELEVATORS

MINER 2049ER

In terms of level design, *Miner 2049er* looks most to Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* for inspiration, but it differentiates itself with its transportation devices. As well as moving platforms and transporters, Bill Hogue's platformer features cherry pickers, a cannon and interconnected slides.

MINER 2049ER II

Mike Livesay's Apple II exclusive has some wild and wonderful means of transport. Its rocket sled lets you zoom around one level, whereas its cable cars move up and down in sequence. It also has a hot air balloon that descends when you're in it, and then floats there waiting for your return.

BOUNTY BOB STRIKES BACK

Because it's stored on a bigger cartridge, *Miner 2049er*'s follow-up provides far more ways to travel around. The transporters and slides from the original make a comeback, but it also has hoists, grain elevators and suction tubes – some of which are bi-directional and switch-operated.

MINER 2049ER (MOBILE)

Besides its battery-powered elevator, the modes of transport in the mobile update of *Miner 2049er* revisit the best of those in the original game and its official sequel. As well as winches – which you can control, and gravity lifts – which you can't, there are slides and transporters.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: NEXT LEVEL

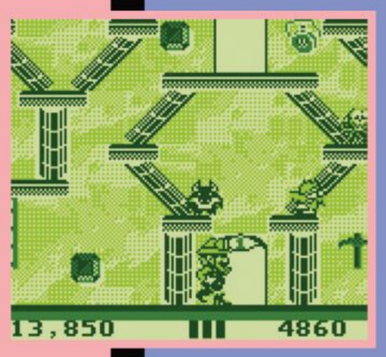
HOW FLOODS AND ACID RAIN LED TO SCROLLING STAGES AND OPTIMAL ROUTES

MINER 2049ER II

For the most part, *Miner 2049er II* takes the mechanics from the original and expands on them. So its level designs still revolve around colouring frameworks, but there are fresh hazards like lasers, floors with moving gaps and the sequel's most imaginative challenge – a flooding mine.

BOUNTY BOB STRIKES BACK

The levels in *Bounty Bob Strikes Back* don't take prisoners, though they don't introduce many new dangers to the series either. Instead, you get stages with numerous platforms or slides infested with mutants. The one new threat that the sequel throws your way is showers of acid rain.



MINER 2049ER (GAME BOY)

The Game Boy *Miner 2049er* offers excellent fan service, in that it reworks stages from the original and *Bounty Bob Strikes Back*. However, its levels are bigger than the screen and they scroll to let you explore them, which works well unless you're transporting to a previously unknown location.

MINER 2049ER (MOBILE)

Although it uses similar mechanics to the original and recreates some of its interactive features, the mobile reimagining boasts entirely new level designs. Each of these is laid out so that taking some routes through them is faster than others, which is crucial to beating its clock.

» [Atari 8-bit] The fact that *Miner 2049er*'s canon can be loaded with too much TNT only adds to the fun.

» [Apple II] It's great for joyrides, but *Miner 2049er II*'s rocket sled is best used as a portable platform.

▶ and he naturally started on a sequel – a vertically-scrolling title called *Scraper Caper*. But progress was slow, and this led to a third party developing an alternative follow-up. "Micro Fun was getting increasingly annoyed with us, because it had a verbal agreement to do an Apple II version of our next game," Bill sighs. "So it basically just said that it was done waiting for us and did *Miner 2049er II* itself. It wasn't like I wasn't getting any money out of it, but creatively I wasn't totally on board. And I don't think I had an Apple II, so I didn't have a way to play it – or even see it."

At some point after *Miner 2049er II* came out, Bill scrapped his plans for a scrolling sequel and reworked *Scraper Caper* in isometric, before abandoning it altogether in favour of a straightforward follow-up to *Miner 2049er* with artist Curtis Mikolyski. "When I did *Bounty Bob Strikes Back*, I was totally out of control!" Bill jokes. "That was when I did the 40K bank-selected cartridge. I'm not aware of any other cartridges that were that *big*. I created a whole editing program for Curtis to design all of those levels, and he got pretty evil! You talk about difficult levels, he was snickering with laughter when I would try some of them. I was like 'Curtis, this is way too hard!' But he didn't want anyone to just be blowing through the game."

> "When I did Bounty Bob Strikes Back, I was totally out of control! I'm not aware of any other cartridges that were that big"
>
> BILL HOGUE

Some of the most evil designs Curtis came up with revolved around suction tubes that Bill had dreamt up, which sucked Bob from one place to another. But channelling his mean streak, Curtis designed stages with two-way switch-operated variants. "Curtis couldn't *program* the suction tubes with the diverter valves or more complicated things like that," Bill points out, "but he could certainly place them and move them around. That was then our collaboration to come up with something a little bit different on those levels, where I gave him the ability through the editing program to be able to do something like that."

» [Apple II] Timing is key when you're leaping between cable cars and platforms in *Miner 2049er II*.

» [Atari 8-bit] The dual-direction suction tubes are *Bounty Bob Strikes Back*'s most sophisticated devices.

Another innovative hazard was added to one of the sequel's levels based on an environmental phenomenon of the day, which had been immortalised by a rock band. "There was a Rush song that had acid rain in its lyrics – something about 'red alert, acid rain,'" Bill recalls. "So the acid rain was strictly from the news; that was what was going on in the world at the time. I think acid rain was just chemicals going up in the air and then coming back down. It was just another hazard where we asked ourselves how we could do things slightly differently on that level than we had done before."

But in reviewing the stiff challenge posed by the levels Curtis was creating, it occurred to Bill that their follow-up should have a few simpler, less challenging bonus stages. "I think that was me trying to reign in Curtis," Bill reflects. "So I was saying 'OK, you've just created this impossibly hard level, why don't you let the poor player have a rest just to catch their breath!' It would make them feel good about what they had just achieved, and I think Curtis may have been able to design those easier levels all by himself without requiring any extra special equipment from me."

These concessionary stages aside, Curtis continued to produce rock-hard levels, and for his penultimate design he wanted Bounty Bob's ordinarily platform-locked foes to be able to chase the hero up ladders and down slides. "Curtis may have innocently asked me if the mutants could move around, and I would have said something like 'What? No! And here's the reason why,'" Bill notes. "Then we probably argued. But I would have thought about it, and decided that maybe there was a way to do it, but with limitations; we would be restricting the number of mutants and where they could go."

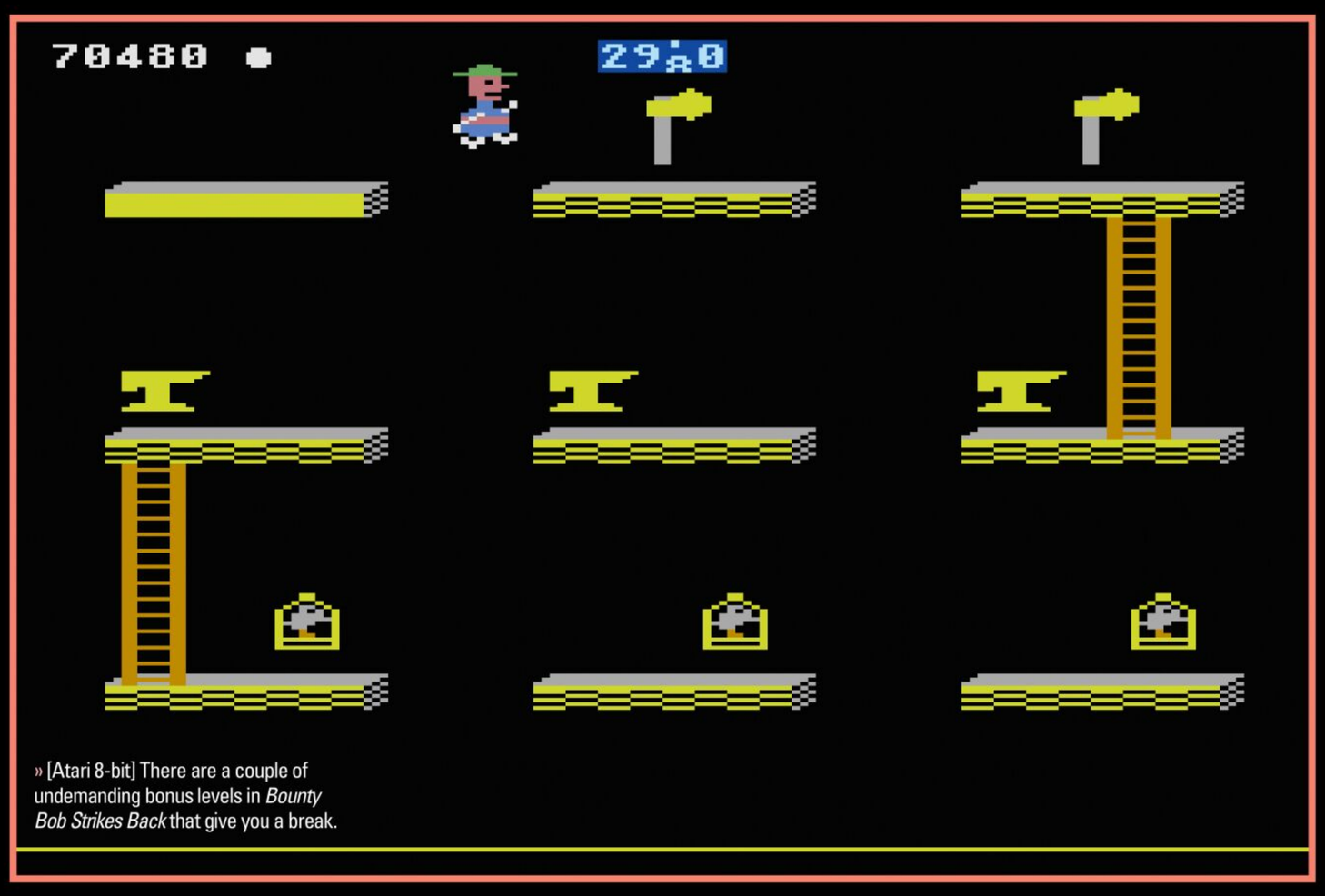
» [Atari 8-bit] *Bounty Bob Strikes Back*'s penultimate level has mutants that can use ladders and slides.

» [Atari 8-bit] Precise jumps, numerous platforms, hoards of mutants – this *Bounty Bob Strikes Back* stage is *hard*.

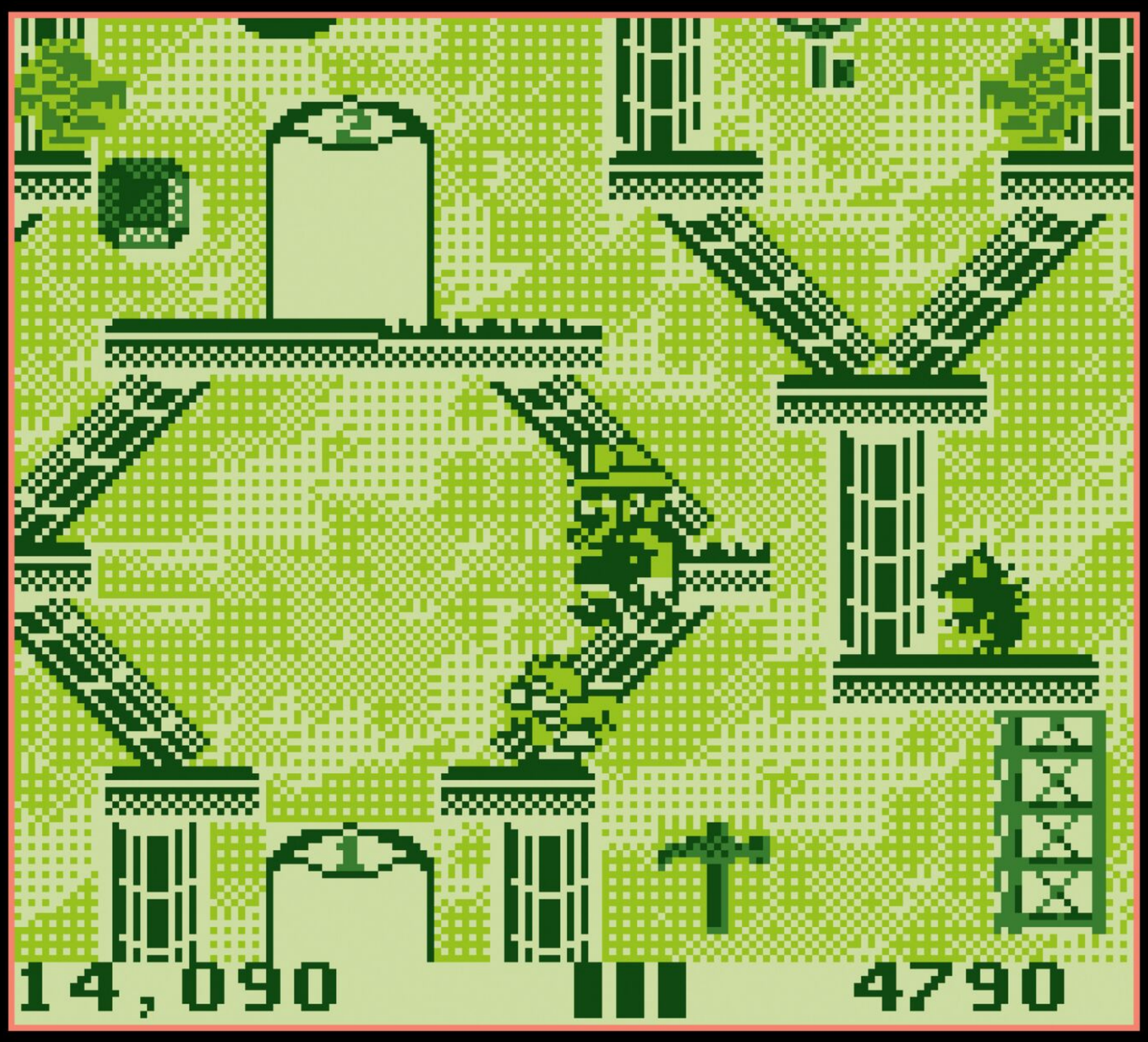
Bill placed another restriction on his game to give its release more impact, more specifically he kept it top secret – even from his staff, including his mother. He also hoped this would help stop conversions being released before the original, as had happened with *Miner 2049er*. "I had some sort of motion detector under my desk so that if somebody walked into my room it would blank my screen!" Bill laughs. "My mom answered the phone all of the time, and I couldn't trust her to keep a secret. Also, I didn't want the same thing to happen again where another version of *Bounty Bob Strikes Back* came out before mine!"

When it was revealed in 1984, Bill's follow-up netted a top-ten chart position, but because the sequel was released during rather than before the US videogame crash it was far less profitable than it would have been, and the industry's decline ultimately led to Bill leaving it. "There was a period after *Bounty Bob Strikes Back* when Jeff Zinn was working at my house, and we were toying with different ideas, but it just never led anywhere," Bill says of a potential third *Miner* title. "I recall telling him that we couldn't keep on doing this because the sales weren't coming in anymore. We had to go out and get jobs in the real world."

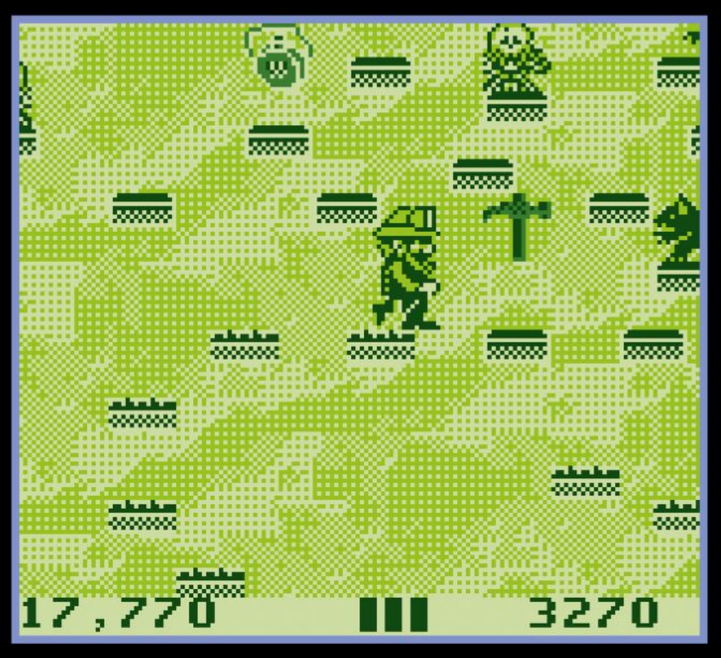
But despite Bill moving on from videogames, the start of the following decade saw him licensing *Miner 2049er* to Mindscape, which designed scrolling versions of levels from his game and its sequel for a Game Boy adaptation – albeit without Bill's input. "I honestly don't have any memory of the Game Boy *Miner* ▶



» [Atari 8-bit] There are a couple of undemanding bonus levels in *Bounty Bob Strikes Back* that give you a break.



» [Game Boy] The slides in the Game Boy *Miner 2049er* adaptation are more modular than the original's.



» [Game Boy] The Game Boy *Miner 2049er*'s levels are from the original and its sequel, but its power-ups last longer.

2049er," Bill admits. "The developers weren't integrating with me on a daily basis; there was more of a 'We've done it, here it is,' approach. I definitely did get a copy, but there was no way I could play it as I didn't have a Game Boy."

In the late-2000s, a second *Miner 2049er* licence followed – this time for mobile phones, thanks to Canadian developer Magmic. Level designer Erin Martel remembers reimagining Bill's Eighties platformer with an eye to modern tastes. "Whenever you're trying to modernise a game it's a little bit like you're walking a tightrope," Erin says. "You're trying to make things more interesting and more palatable for people who might be new to the franchise, but you also want to stay true to the spirit of the original."

But while Magmic wanted to capture the essence of Bill's Atari 8-bit classic, it decided that demanding pixel-perfect jumping from players was going a step too far. "Being able to change direction mid-jump was something that players were used to at that point," Erin explains. "So we tried to strike a compromise, where Bounty Bob could be a little bit more athletic while still staying within the realm of believability. I mean, the character was supposed to be a real person – he wasn't like Sonic The Hedgehog!"

Magmic made further changes to Bill's original, including a focus on making players work out optimal routes around the stages in order to beat its clock. "We really wanted to make players think tactically," Erin considers, "and a lot of the tactics had to do with the

» [Mobile] As well as new level designs, Bob has far more control of his jumps in the mobile *Miner 2049er.*

» [Mobile] The mobile *Miner 2049er*'s levels are bigger than the original's, so their slides eat up more time.

"We really wanted to make players think tactically, and a lot of the tactics had to do with choosing the most efficient path"

ERIN MARTEL

layout of the levels and choosing the most efficient path. If the player was able to go through a level at their leisure then the timer wouldn't have *really* been a game mechanic. So it was to give it some teeth."

In terms of modes of transport, Magmic decided that its modern *Miner 2049er* should largely incorporate those used in the original rather than adding too many new ways of getting around stages. "There were plenty of methods already in our game," Erin recollects, "but we could have definitely added more. I mean, imagine if there was a bounce mechanic. That could have been interesting, so instead of just moving straight up and down if maybe you had extra jumping power. That might have been a missed opportunity."

A deliberate omission was made by not including the original game's TNT-powered cannon, which Magmic swapped out for an elevator system that ran on radioactive batteries. "The mechanics were very similar," Erin observes, "because in ours you were collecting batteries. But the cannon was far cooler in terms of personality, so I think the original version's endgame was probably a little bit better. The cannon was more fun, and it was more mechanically rich, so I don't know what our thought process was."

Looking back at Magmic's reinvention of *Miner 2049er*, Erin is pleased with its modernised stages, and the way that they paid tribute to the original Atari 8-bit title. "Looking at all of the levels now I'm pretty happy at the way they turned out," Erin reviews. "I think that they were really fun, but really challenging. I just hope that our new version gave fans the same feeling as the original did."

On the games that started the series – *Miner 2049er* and *Bounty Bob Strikes Back* – Bill likens the time spent developing them to a former life, but his enthusiasm for making a third *Miner* game is clear to see from his parting comments. "It's a little bit of a disconnect, because it's so long ago," Bill concedes, "I've long since forgotten all of the pain and all of the work we put into them. But working with Curtis again, that would be fun! I'm sure Curtis and I could do the sequel to *Bounty Bob Strikes Back*. That would be something for if I were to ever officially retire – maybe on the iPhone or something."

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: OBJECT LESSON

FROM TOOLS AND CAMEOS TO ENERGY SNACKS AND HOUSEHOLD OBJECTS

MINER 2049ER

Although the abandoned tools in *Miner 2049er* are a good fit for its futuristic mine setting, the game's teacups, burgers and flowerpots make for more unusual collectibles. Aesthetics aside, all of these objects are power-ups that temporarily allow you to dispatch Bob's mutant enemies.

MINER 2049ER II

The Apple II sequel takes a different approach to objects than its predecessor, in that most of its levels have few or no power-ups at all. The items the game does have are all snacks or drinks, except for a decapitated head, which belongs to the hero of the developer's previous game.

BOUNTY BOB STRIKES BACK

The mines in *Bounty Bob Strikes Back* are full of home and gardening items – kitchen knives, candle sticks, watering cans, you name it! Like *Miner 2049er*, they let you kill mutants. More interestingly, there are energy bars on one level, which let Bob run far faster and jump much further.

» [Mobile] They're arguably the best hazards in *Miner 2049er*, and the pulverisers work well in the mobile update.

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Target: Renegade

TIME IS A GREAT HEALER

» ZX SPECTRUM » 1988 » IMAGINE SOFTWARE

I was a massive fan of *Renegade* in the arcades and I was equally impressed with the excellent Amstrad version, which did a fantastic job of capturing the grittiness of the arcade original. When it was revealed that an 8-bit sequel was heading to home computers courtesy of Imagine Software I was equally excited, and upon playing I wasn't disappointed by the final game.

The inspiration of *Target: Renegade* is obvious, this is the game *Double Dragon* should have been on the home computers of the time. It runs at a good speed, there's a great selection of moves on offer, plenty of weapons to use and a varied range of bad guys to beat up. It made the Amstrad version of *Double Dragon* look utterly feeble in comparison.

But today I'm not here to wax lyrical about the enjoyable Amstrad version and I'm certainly not here to talk about the disappointing single-player C64 effort, it's the Spectrum outing that is the focus of my love. I've been fairly critical of it in the past, suggesting it's a weak effort next to the colourful Amstrad offering, but after playing it again recently I don't think that's a fair assessment.

While it's true all the sprites are monochromatic, they're exceptionally crafted and filled with character, from the flat-nosed skinheads that assault you with pool cues to the dogs that constantly worry you as you make your way through a local park. There's a wonderful cartoony vibe to the Spectrum outing that gives it oodles of charm and it's difficult to not be impressed by it. Even when you're brutally kneeing someone in the groin you can't help but grin at their shocked faces as they receive each painful blow.

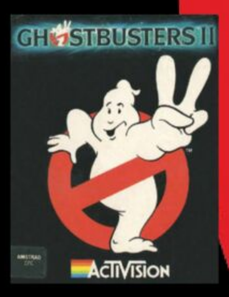
And make no mistake, Imagine Software's game is a brutal one and groins aren't the only body part your hero will happily pulverise as he makes his way through the lengthy levels towards Mr Big. Whether you're punching someone repeatedly in the face, dropping them to the floor with a swing of your axe or viciously punching their prone bodies, you feel every blow you inflict, and it feels great.

For all its brutality I thoroughly enjoyed playing through *Target: Renegade* again and it has given me a newfound respect for the Spectrum version, which I never had before. And just think – it only took me 30-odd years to change my mind. ✱

THE MAKING OF GHOSTBUSTERS II

WITH A NEW FILM FEATURING THE ORIGINAL CAST DUE TO APPEAR SHORTLY, WE AIM OUR PROTON PACK ENERGY STREAMS TOWARDS THE GAME THAT LOOKED TO TIE-IN WITH THE 1989 SEQUEL

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES & DARRAN JONES



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- **DEVELOPER:** FOURSFIELD
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** VARIOUS

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DIZZY
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987

GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987

FAST FOOD (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989

GHOSTBUSTERS™ II

G*hostbusters II* on the 8-bit and 16-bit home computers had a problem: It had nothing to do with the film. It began to receive mixed reviews; almost an inevitable situation, given the high quality and popularity of the original supernatural comedy and the limits of videogames in the late Eighties. It didn't have anything to do with the quality of the game's graphics, either, for they were largely excellent. Nor was it the audio: there was an excellent rendition of the *Ghostbusters* tune. The game even included digitised stills from the movie. But there was a problem nonetheless.

In issue 28 of the EMAP magazine *ACE*, a reviewer took issue with the game's three, relatively short levels on the home computer versions. Although they were rather varied, not to mention difficult – which meant gamers would end up playing each one for a while before cracking them – the magazine clearly wanted more bang for its buck and it was, as you'd expect, unafraid to state its feelings.

The reviewer said the game "fails to succeed both as a film conversion and as a game in its own right". They added, "Interestingly enough, the film was originally going to be called *The Last Of The Ghostbusters*. After this, I hope it is." Further damning *Ghostbusters II* as a turkey and slamming it for having arrived on three disks (four on the Atari ST), the magazine awarded the game a paltry 251 out of 1,000. It caused a storm which blew all over the trade press at the time and proved to be hugely embarrassing for a gaming franchise that had debuted so well five years earlier.

The real issue is that there were actually four versions of *Ghostbusters II*: a difficult, single-player side-scroller for the NES by Imagineering; a cool action release by Dynamix for DOS, a neat Game Boy effort by HAL Laboratory, and a home computer version by Foursfield for the Amiga, Atari ST, C64, Amstrad CPC and ZX Spectrum (the MSX port was by New Frontier). It was the Foursfield effort that *ACE* had cast its eyes over, most notably for the 16-bit computers. In all cases, the games were published by Activision, who had secured the movie licence from Columbia Pictures. "The licence was acquired by Activision as part of an arcade deal – it might even have been the US side," says Charles Cecil, Activision's development manager at the time. The idea was for the film to be released in the summer of 1989 and for the game to follow shortly afterwards in the expectation that it would become a great holiday season seller. The previous *Ghostbusters* game, from 1984, had sold more than two million copies and had become the best-selling game of all time – a title it still held five years later. There was a great weight of expectation for the sequel and there had been hope among players that David Crane, who created the first game, would be on board for the new game.

> "THE LICENCE WAS ACQUIRED BY ACTIVISION AS PART OF AN ARCADE DEAL – IT MIGHT EVEN HAVE BEEN THE US SIDE"
> **CHARLES CECIL**

» [Atari ST] Once you start swinging it can be very hard to regain control.

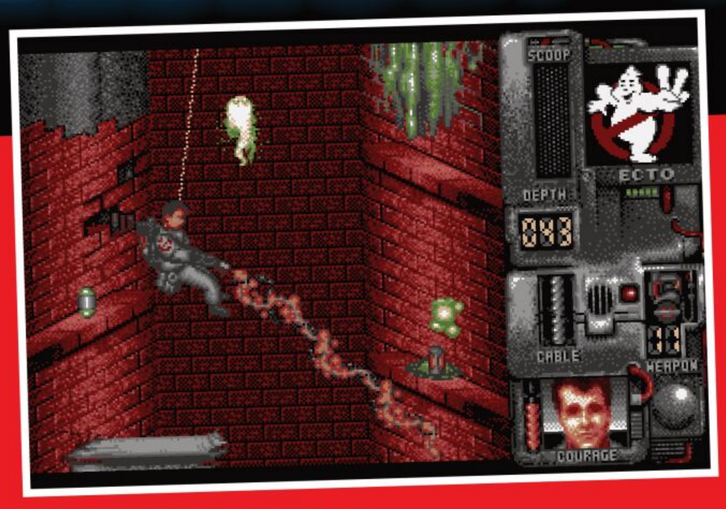
» [Amiga] If you don't protect your rope it will break and you'll plummet to your doom.

» After a rummage through his loft, Philip found this original media for *Ghostbusters II*.

CONVERSION CAPERS

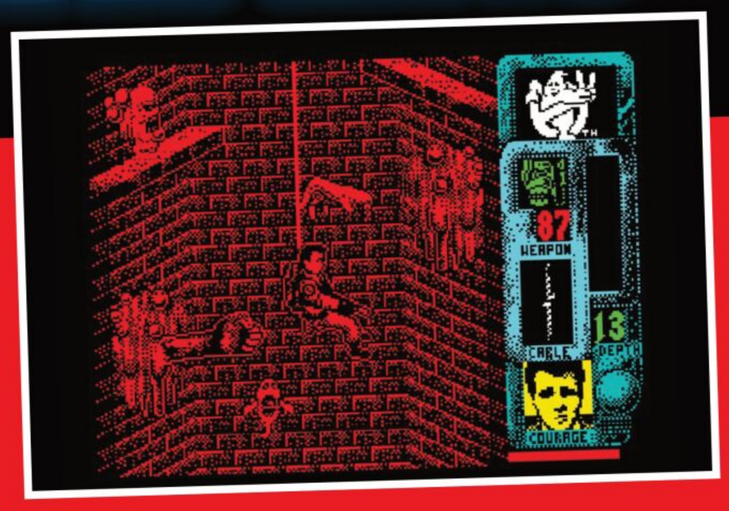
AMIGA

■ As you'd expect the 16-bit versions look impressive, especially the digitised depictions of the Ghostbusters. Graphics are detailed throughout and there's some nice animation. There's no in-game music but it does have a solid rendition of the theme tune on the title screen. It doesn't have the greatest controls, so it's quite tough.



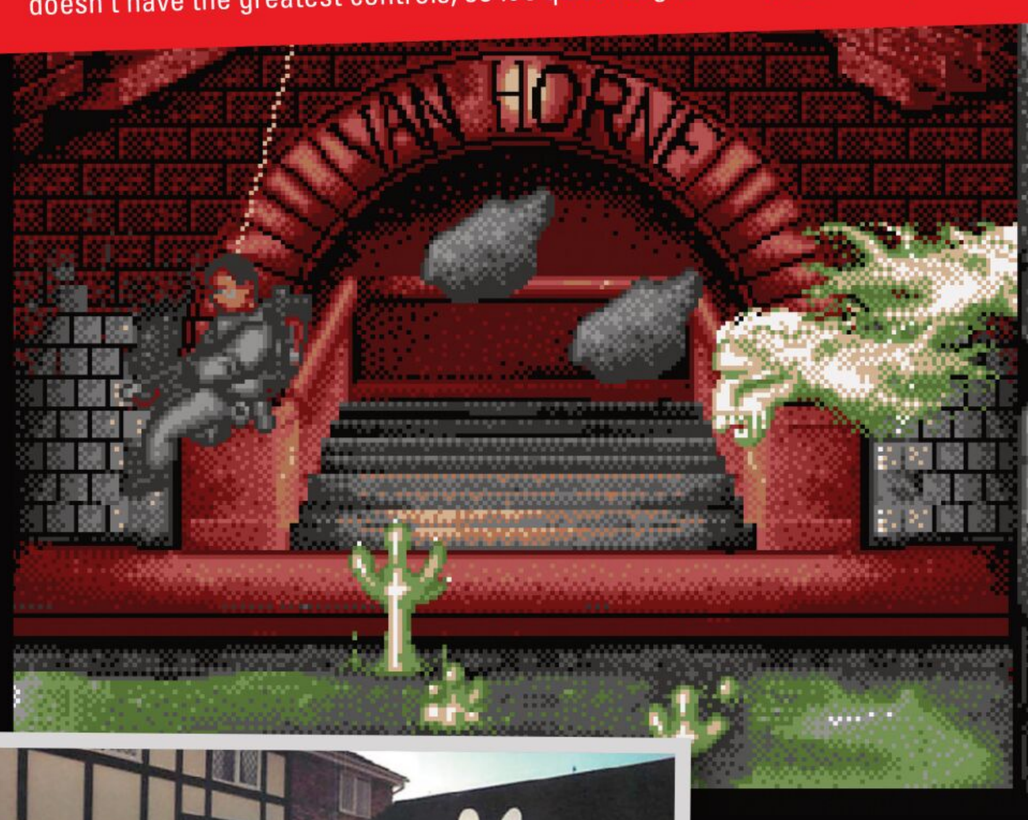
ATARI ST

■ To be honest we found very little difference between the two 16-bit versions. It doesn't feel quite as tough as the Amiga version, but it's still no walk in the park. Stage 2 feels a little jerkier compared to the Amiga game, and the sound feels punchier, but otherwise there's very little in it.



ZX SPECTRUM

■ While the colour schemes are pretty poor we do like how detailed the graphics are. The sound effects are largely awful throughout, but there's a noble attempt to replicate the theme tune that we did enjoy. The controls feel a little stodgy at times, making that first stage rather tricky to get through.



» [Amiga] It's not enough to just reach the bottom. You have to take a sample back to the surface. Eep!

» [Amstrad CPC] You actually have control of the flame for a limited time, making it easier to battle incoming enemies.

» The development team hang out outside their base at Shrewton Close as the game nears launch.

» [Amstrad CPC] The second stage features the Statue Of Liberty and lots of tiny New Yorkers.

▶ It wasn't to be, but Activision was confident that Foursfield, a relatively small developer based in Warminster near Trowbridge, would be able to pull it off. The developer consisted of a husband and wife team, Anna and Stefan Ufnowska, talented programmer Colin Reed, and accomplished artist, Steven Green, each of who had worked on the acclaimed isometric maze game *Incredible Shrinking Sphere*, a title that Philip and Andrew Oliver – aka the Oliver twins – had converted to the 8-bits.

"Activision had worked with Stefan on a number of projects and the most memorable, for me, was *The Incredible Shrinking Sphere*," says Charles. Similar to *Marble Madness* and *Spindizzy*, the game involved guiding a ball through levels, collecting weapons and making use of various squares. The Amiga version had achieved 923 out of 1,000 in *ACE* and it had scored more than 80 for other systems (the poor CPC version excepted). There was no doubting Foursfield's credentials. But in developing *Ghostbusters II* for the Amiga, Atari ST and Commodore 64, the team not only had just six months in which to complete the game, they also had to work 'blind'.

Starting in February 1989, Anna Ufnowska said the team had little else to go on except the movie script – an unavoidable situation, as the film was still in production when work on the game began. It meant none of the title's programmers, designers or artists had the benefit of seeing the film, forcing the Ufnowskas to look for scenes which they felt would work well and concentrate on those.

As such, the first decision had to be how many of those scenes it would be able to include and how best to visualise them. Initially, consideration had been given to creating four levels for the game and, indeed, some previews in the gaming press suggested there would be four arcade-style scenarios, each of which would stress the comedy inherent in the movie. But instead it was decided the game would revolve around just three, unique levels, each one based on what was felt would be the main beats of the movie.

"Taking just two scenes from the movie, and producing just two small games would not have been enough, but four or more would have been prohibitively expensive and there simply wasn't the time available either," says Philip Oliver who, along with brother Andrew, had been quickly brought on board to continue

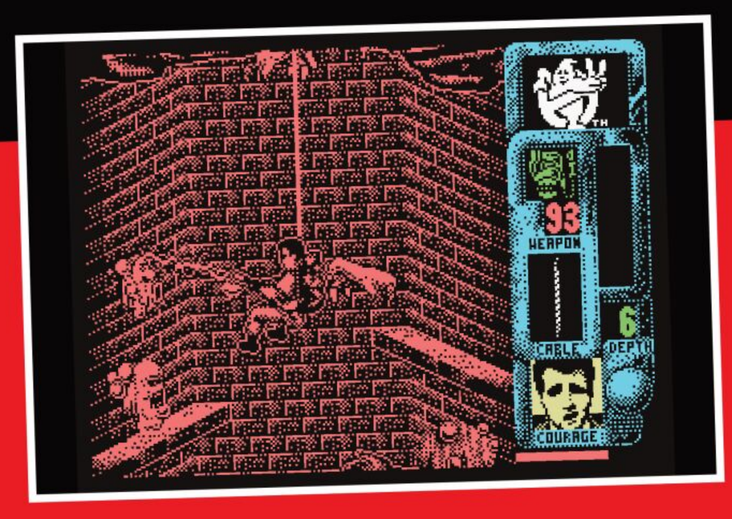
WHICH VERSIONS WON'T LEAVE YOU FEELING SLIMED?

COMMODORE 64

■ Like many of the versions this was lambasted on release and it's easy to see why. Despite some cracking music from David Whittaker the visuals are pretty weak for the machine with murky, muddy visuals throughout. The controls don't feel very responsive either which makes some stages exceptionally hard.

AMSTRAD CPC

■ This is probably the best of the 8-bit versions thanks to surprisingly detailed visuals and great use of colour. Even the theme tune sounds reasonably solid for the machine's sound chip. It's not all good news though as it's marred by the same sticky controls and harsh difficulty setting that affects the other versions.



MSX

■ This is a port of a port being based on the Oliver twins' Spectrum offering, which itself was based on the versions by Foursfield. It looks nice enough, with the same detailed sprites as the Spectrum game, but it does feel a lot slower. It's much trickier as a result, meaning you may struggle to reach the final stages.

their relationship with Foursfield, working on the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions.

The twins had needed no persuading to get involved in the project. "Stefan Ufnowska asked us if we'd like to convert *Ghostbusters II* and we jumped at the chance," says Philip. It was a busy period for the pair, who would end up juggling the programming of *Ghostbusters II* with coding *Jet Ski Simulator*, *Operation Gunship* and *Fantasy World Dizzy*, each for the CPC and Spectrum. But to speed up production, they would convert *Ghostbusters II* from the CPC to the Spectrum as they went along.

The twins' workload during this period entailed seven months of 18 to 20-hour days, seven days a week but the brothers had bags of energy (and, they admit, no social life at this time). Aged just 21, the twins had already mustered up a sizeable gameography and even spawned a much-loved character in *Dizzy*. But they were no strangers to ghostly goings on. "We were massive fans of *Ghostbusters* and it had inspired us to write another game, *Ghost Hunters*, a couple of years before," says Philip. The pair worked from a four-bedroom house they had bought six months earlier in Trowbridge. They would drive the 15 minutes to Bratton, in the shadow of the Westbury White Horse, every few weeks to meet up with Foursfield where the team would comment on their progress, pass over assets and work on moving the game towards completion.

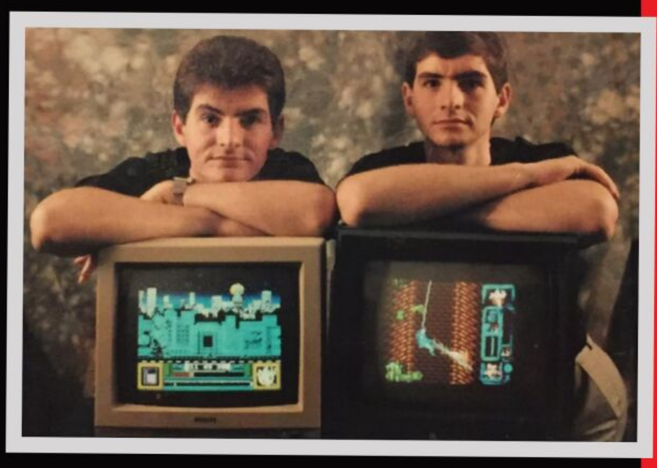
» [Amiga] The digitised shots of the Ghostbusters add some authenticity.

The Ufnowskas decided the first level should be based upon a short scene in the film in which Dr Raymond Stantz is lowered down a manhole on the streets of New York in order to investigate some paranormal activity. While there, Stantz discovers a thick, oozing river of slime and collects a sample, almost getting pulled under by gloopy ghosts in the process. For the developers, this movie scene appeared to be perfect gaming material and so it was translated into the player having to guide Stantz down past an assortment of unrelenting ghouls and ghosts. The aim was the same as the movie – to collect slime – but it would be possible to fire at the ghosts to shoo them away. "Sadly, in the movie this scene was short and they removed any ghostly apparitions," says Philip. Yet it still made for an intriguing, fun opener.

> "WE WERE MASSIVE FANS OF GHOSTBUSTERS AND IT HAD INSPIRED US TO WRITE ANOTHER GAME, GHOST HUNTERS, A COUPLE OF YEARS BEFORE"
> **PHILIP OLIVER**

To make it more challenging, the ghosts were able to scratch away at the rope supporting Dr Stantz in order to weaken it. There were also protruding obstacles, which would force the player to swing the ghostbuster away, usually into the path of a ghoul. It was certainly a tricky and original start to the game, given there was so much to consider, from collecting glasses and slime to amassing weapons and firing at the ghouls. Even when you reached the bottom of the air shaft, there was no let up; it was a case of heading straight back to the top to face a second onslaught. Even though the player could make use of a protective shield, it wasn't especially easy. Not only was the only hand-holding on offer some spooky hands reaching out to scare you half to death, you only had three lives.

"But the design was logical," Philip says. "Descend the shaft, collect the slime, and then escape. To add gameplay we needed to put threats along the route." As for the difficulty, Philip offers no apologies. "If a game was easy, in the Eighties, that suggested in some way that it was inferior," says Philip. "Reviewers were expert game players and they dictated the opinion towards games through their reviews. If they found them too easy they often slammed them. That encouraged most game developers to target core players rather than casual."



» Philip and Andrew showing off the final game.

» [Amiga] The digitised cutscenes look pretty good on the more powerful Amiga.

One of the pleasant twists to this level was having an image of Stantz becoming increasingly terrified depending on what was happening to him within the game. As his courage visually ebbed away, it was up to the player to give him a boost or risk losing a life. It was a flourish replicated later with the other Ghostbusters. "Dan Aykroyd, Bill Murray and Harold Ramis were massive Hollywood stars and it was important to see their faces," says Philip. "We also did the 'team screen' which ▶

TELLING TALES

WITH THREE DISTINCT LEVELS, A WAY OF CREATING A NARRATIVE WAS CRUCIAL

FIVE YEARS LATER...
OSCAR, DANA'S BABY, NARROWLY ESCAPES DEATH BY AUTO AS HIS BUGGY IS DRAGGED BY UNSEEN HANDS INTO THE TRAFFIC OF A BUSY NEW YORK STREET.

LEVEL 1

■ Immediately, the game highlights that the action is taking place five years after the first movie. It explains that a buggy containing Dana's baby, Oscar, was almost crushed after being pushed into the road by a ghost, prompting Spengler and Stantz to investigate. After setting up some fake roadworks, it set the scene for Stantz to be lowered down an airshaft.

LEVEL 2

■ Having spotted the River of Slime, the next set of stills explain that it flows towards the museum. The 16th century tyrant and sorcerer Vigo The Carpathian is building power from people's evil thoughts and the Ghostbusters need a way in. Cue the use of positively charged psychomagnotheric slime to bring the Statue Of Liberty to life.

OSCAR HAS BEEN KIDNAPPED BY THE ENSLAVED JANOSZ.
IT'S SAID THAT VIGO NEEDS THE BODY OF THE BABY TO BE REBORN.
OTHERS SAY, ANY BODY WILL DO!

LEVEL 3

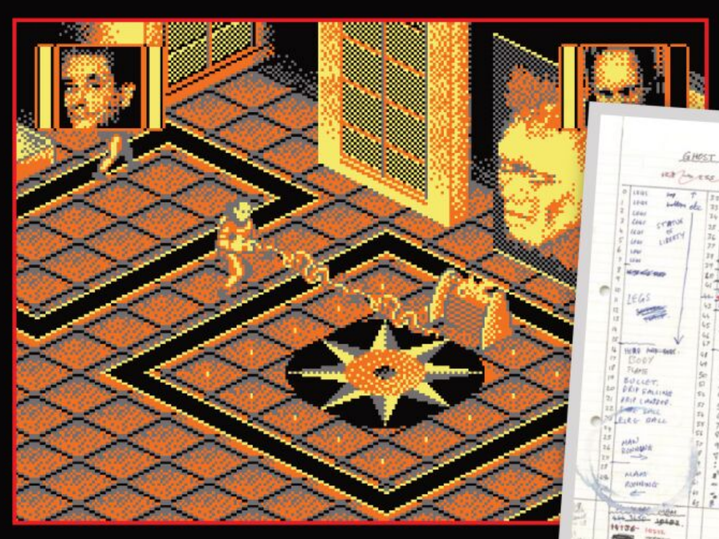
■ The final level was a little short on explanation – only one digitised image was used to set it up. Still, it said all it needed to, telling gamers that baby Oscar had been kidnapped by the enslaved head of the museum's restoration department and that Vigo may need the child's body to be reborn. Succeed and Oscar survives and you win.

» [Amstrad CPC] The third stage starts with you abseiling down for the final battle. Careful, it's easy to slip and die here.

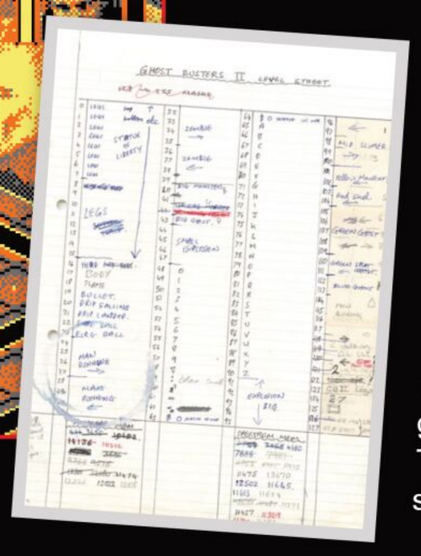
» [NES] *Ghostbusters II* made it to the NES, Game Boy and PC. All three versions are different games and different to the home computer releases

showed all their faces as large as possible." Not that the frightened faces were especially difficult to create, for the Oliver Twins at least. "It was just another set of sprites," Philip says. "We didn't think too hard or long about it. We had the 16-bit ST and Amiga versions of all the graphics created by Steve and we simply redrew each in Panda Sprites. It probably took us less than an hour." What did take longer, though, was working out ways to push ageing 8-bit technology. There was no doubt that the 16-bit platforms offered some stark advantages over the CPC and Spectrum. This could be felt in the first level, certainly by Philip, who says the Atari ST and Amiga were able to easily and smoothly scroll the screen, whereas the pixel-mapped screens of the 8-bits seemed more lethargic and so proved trickier to play. The difficulty in replicating the 16-bit experience showed how demanding the game actually was for the less powerful computers. Yet there was no faulting the ambition of what Foursfield was trying to achieve as it produced a game which it hoped would appeal to a full-price gaming market.

One of the accusations levelled at *Ghostbusters II* was that the levels were too dissimilar to each other and that the overall experience felt disjointed. But this served to add variety, effectively giving three games in one, and the criticism actually glossed over the fact that the game was connected by a common theme: lots of green, gooey slime. This became a running enemy mechanic throughout the game and it lent the title a greater sense of coherence.



» [Amstrad CPC] You'll be fighting the controls as well as the boss in this final level.



The second section involved marching the Statue Of Liberty towards the Metropolitan Museum Of Art, while aiming multi-directional fireballs at ghosts that are hellbent on stopping the robed figure in her tracks. The key component to this section was having the city's population scurrying around to collect the slime left behind when a ghost was blasted, in order to replenish the statue's supplies.

"Since *Ghostbusters II*'s plot revolved around the energy contained in slime, it was this substance that the Ghostbusters used to animate the Statue Of Liberty," continues Philip. "So this theme ran throughout the game as much as it did the film". Bringing the Statue Of Liberty to life and walking it through New York was a key scene in the movie. "It made sense to turn this into a game," Philip says. "The gameplay itself was based on classic, tried and tested horizontal-scrolling shooters, particularly the extremely popular *R-Type*."

In order to explain what was going on at each stage, movie stills and a small amount of text would aid the narrative and provide a second linking point. Columbia had handed the original images to Activision and Steven Green converted them for use in the game. Steven was also responsible for all of the 16-bit graphics which the twins converted to the Amstrad and Spectrum. How they translated to each platform was inevitably down to the capabilities of the computers, their resolutions and colour palettes.

On this score, reviewers and players, were unanimous in their appreciation. The graphics pushed the expectations of the Amstrad CPC in particular. Reviewers also enjoyed the audio, which had been professionally produced by David Whittaker. The result was actually, in hindsight, a game that was deeper than many an Eighties movie tie-in, a lot of which would take several key scenes and turn them into relatively shallow games spread over many levels ("Depth was hard to achieve in movie games," says Philip. "Developers would be tied to the film and that made the challenge of deeper gameplay hard to achieve"). This could be seen in the final section: an isometric 3D level

» [Amiga] This neat little intro is missing from the 8-bit versions of the game.

which asked the player to control each of the four main characters as they faced various showdowns within the city museum.

"The final battle of the film takes place in the museum as Dr Janosz Poha attempts to release the spirit of Vigo The Carpathian, a powerful 17th-century tyrant and magician trapped in a painting in the gallery," Philip explains of the decision to use this as the basis of the level. "Vigo orders Janosz to locate a child that Vigo can possess, allowing him to return to life on the New Year. Being the film's final climax, it had to be the game's final level. Foursfield had chosen to design this as a series of 3D isometric rooms that players had to run around in order to defeat Janosz, Vigo and protect the baby. This was a good idea but technically pretty tricky, especially on 8-bit computers." Again, slime played its part to great effect.

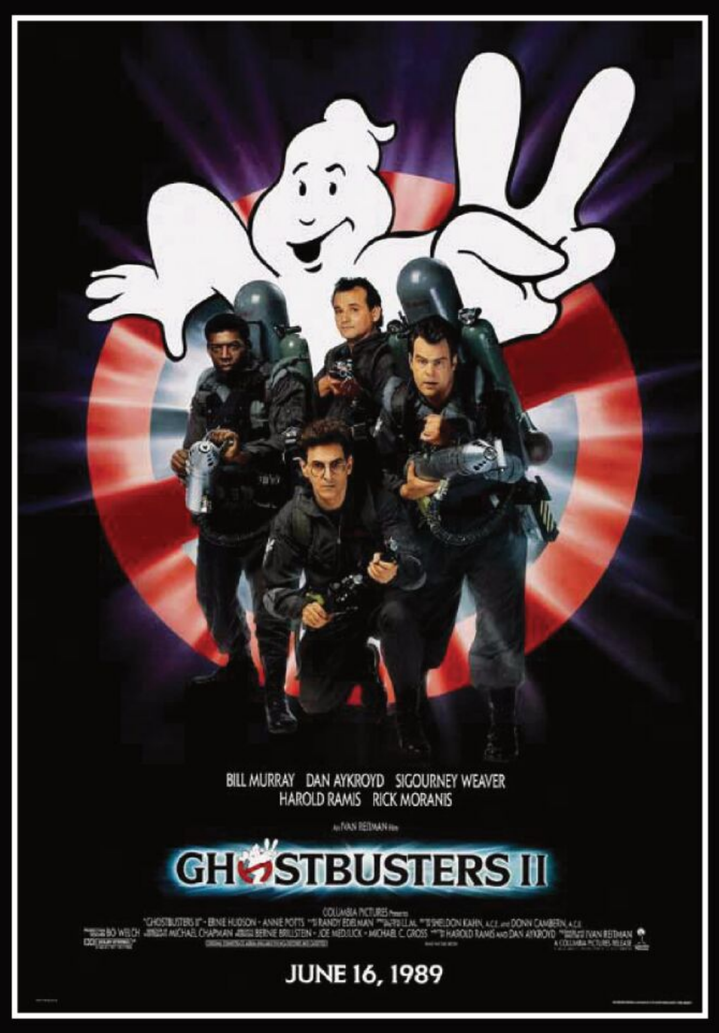
> "IT WAS A PRIVATE VIEWING AND WE WERE SITTING ALONGSIDE FILM REVIEWERS INCLUDING BARRY NORMAN, WHO WAS REVIEWING FOR FILM 89"
> **PHILIP OLIVER**

As the project neared its very end, the developers finally got to see the film. Having viewed the script and seen the stills, they had a solid idea of how it was going to work in principle but seeing it on the big screen was a chance to put the two works side-by-side. They had been invited to the media showing at Leicester Square in London. "It was a private viewing and we were sitting alongside film reviewers including Barry Norman, who was reviewing for *Film 89*," recalls Philip. "By this point the game was pretty much finished, though."

As such, the game was wrapped up and readied for release (albeit around a month late which Philip says was because the 16-bit assets hadn't been delivered on time, which had a knock-on effect on the 8-bit versions). Buoyed by the popularity of the film, before certain criticisms, it sold well. To entice buyers, some freebies were given away – notably a free balloon and badge and, in the Computer Shop store chain, a *Ghostbusters II* frisbee. And then the problem of the *ACE* review reared its head. It was strange that it caused such a furore, given that it wasn't the only poor review. *Zzap!* gave it just 39% and called it "a hotch-potch of sub-games which fail to gel into a good game". But the niggling of the write-up in *ACE* appeared to rankle the most.

Activision wasn't delighted with the review; neither was Anna Ufnowska, who wrote a letter to the editor that was published the following month. In it, she accepted that reviews were opinions but she objected to the claims about there being too many disks, saying there were actually only two Amiga disks and that four were necessary for the Atari ST to cater for owners of single-sided drives. She also pulled up the mag for the zero review given for the sound. *ACE* stood by its review but revised the audio to an eight. "Since this was the one bright spark in an otherwise gloomy review, it's doubly sad that we should have slipped up," it corrected.

The shots fired seemed to ignore the CPC and Spectrum versions, though. Although the three short levels were mentioned over and over, Amstrad Action gave *Ghostbusters II* a whopping 94% and *Crash* handed it a respectable 74%. The cassette versions were hauled over the coals for being multiload games – it meant reloading the game over and over which, as anyone who has experienced such a thing will tell you, was a major pain. But in the longer-term – when it was given a budget £2.99 re-release on the Hit Squad label – it began to get the positive attention it deserved as more and more fans were gradually drawn to the game. "We thought the game captured the key scenes from the film really well and utilised the theme of the energy in the slime perfectly," Philip concludes. So, it wasn't a game changing licensed release, but it was an interesting example of the genre. ✱



STUDIO INTERFERENCE

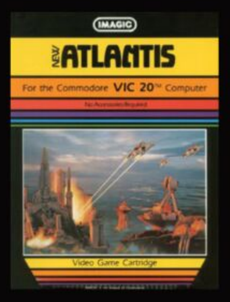
■ In general, Columbia Pictures did not get too involved in the development of the game, leaving it to the various games companies to interpret the movie in their own way. Activision would keep an eye on progress but there was a confidence at the publisher that the developers would pour their efforts into what was such a prestigious job.

The only real problem the studio caused for the team (aside from not having the movie ready before production of the game began) was indecision over the logo. "During production the film company couldn't decide on the final logo and we kept receiving different instructions on which to use," Philip Oliver recalls. "Was it the logo with or without that back foot?"

THE MAKING OF ATLANTIS

THE LEGEND OF A SUNKEN CITY INSPIRED ONE OF IMAGIC'S BIGGEST HITS. WE TALK TO PROGRAMMER DENNIS KOBLE, THE MAN FROM ATLANTIS

WORDS BY PAUL DRURY



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** IMAGIC
- **DEVELOPER:** IMAGIC
- **RELEASED:** 1982
- **PLATFORM:** ATARI 2600, INTELLIVISION
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

In the early days of console games, simple was often the key to success – and that went for naming the title, too. "I liked the fact it was a one-word name for the game and yet with that single word, you could evoke all these images associated with the legend of Atlantis," grins Dennis Koble, designer and coder of Imagic's second best-selling game after *Demon Attack*. "I think we sold two million copies of *Atlantis* and they retailed at $30 with the wholesale price about half of that. Do the numbers. They are staggering!"

The game was a huge money-spinner for Imagic, the company Dennis jointly founded with fellow ex-Atari and Mattel employees in 1981, and it even had a documentary made about its creation: *Enterprise – All In The Game* is on YouTube and is a fascinating insight into those heady days. "*Atlantis* was a pleasure to work on and we were a very cohesive team. I was into new wave music and I remember listening to Oingo Boingo, my favourite group at the time, while I was programming it. I have lots of positive memories."

Dennis was only a lad when he started at Atari's coin-op division in 1976 but he had worked his way up the company ladder and had spent some time in the consumer division in a managerial role, overseeing game development and supporting coders. However, when it came to designing and programming a VCS game at Imagic, this was new territory for Dennis. "My first game, *Trick Shot*, gave me anxiety attacks because it was so hard to get the physics even remotely acting like they would in the real world," he recalls. "By the time I got to *Atlantis*, I was kind of an old hand. I don't recall any major programming challenges. It was an original game concept though I'm sure I was influenced by other games."

Atlantis requires you to defend the eponymous underwater city from attacking gorgon ships, deftly launching missiles from one of your three static bases. If your assailants destroy six key parts of your city, it's game over, though for every 10,000 points you rack up, a part of your watery home is restored. Hang on, Dennis, this is reminding us of a certain Atari coin-op classic. "I was a huge fan of *Missile Command*," he admits, grinning, "I'm sure it inspired me but not consciously. *Atlantis* was quite a simple game but I used our latest technology and credit to my colleague Bob

» [Atari 2600] Shoot down enemies using the outlying bases rather than the central command post and you score double, a vital strategy for those seeking high scores.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

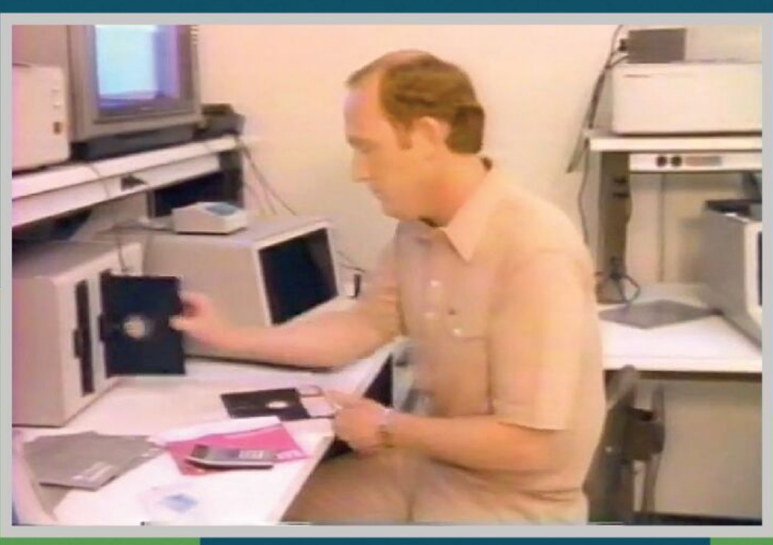
SPRINT 2
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1976

PGA GOLF SIMULATOR
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1990

SONIC SPINBALL (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1993

» Dennis demonstrates *Atlantis* during its development.

» [Atari 2600] The ultrafast gorgon 'bandit bomber' is especially dangerous but destroy it and it acts like a smart bomb, clearing all on-screen enemies.



» Dennis carefully inserts a 5.25 inch floppy into his workstation. You would too. They cost $250,000.

CONVERSION CAPERS

DID THESE VERSIONS OF ATLANTIS SINK OR SWIM?

INTELLIVISION

A very different game from the 2600 version, this uses a crosshair to direct your fire, features a launchable battle pod to take the fight to the enemy and even has night levels, illuminated by giant searchlights. This is definitely worth investigating.

ATARI 8-BIT

This plays much like the 2600 original but the increased power of the Atari home computers means the underwater landscape is a lot more detailed and colourful, as are the gorgon ships. We especially like the deep blue of the ocean.

VIC-20

The main difference here is that you only have your two outer bases with which to defend your city. Dispensing with the central command post increases the difficulty, though by way of compensation, your foes must get closer to sea level to strike a direct hit.

MAGNAVOX 2

This pared-down version has you commanding just two bases and presents you with only five parts of your city to defend. It does, however, get very fast, very quickly and is a fun blast for a machine that was rarely blessed with big name releases.

Smith, who was instrumental in developing techniques like the six-sprite kernel."

The ingenious coding technique Dennis is alluding to allowed for more moving objects to be displayed on-screen than the hardware originally intended and the "latest technology" refers to Imagic's networked development stations, which cost a whopping $250,000 each and allowed programmers to code in higher level languages, rather than Assembly.

This state-of-the-art development system helped Dennis create a visually impressive, fast-paced shooter, with many clever touches, such as a two-player option where each defender controls a single base and an end sequence which sees the survivors of the devastated city escaping in a spaceship, a thematic link to fellow coder Rob Fulop's follow up to *Demon Attack*. "That was supposed to be the Cosmic Ark, which was the title of Rob's next game, though we did call it 'Cosmic Bark' because we thought it was a dog for quite some time," Dennis giggles.

Dennis credits the success of *Atlantis* to the 'easy to learn, hard to master' game design philosophy he learned making arcade titles at Atari. Yet many dedicated gamers did master the game, spurred on by a competition that promised a trip to Bermuda for the top four high scorers and a $10,000 prize for the overall champion. "I went on that trip and it was incredibly fun," remembers Dennis. "The players were amazing and could pretty much play indefinitely, so I created a much harder version of the game. We only made about a hundred of those cartridges, so I think they're pretty collectible now."

Dennis is right – *Atlantis 2* can fetch thousands of dollars today on the rare occasions it surfaces. Sadly, Dennis does not have copies gathering dust in his basement but it does remind him of how he nearly did strike it rich. "We were getting ready to float Imagic [on the stock exchange] and out of spite, Atari tried to bollocks our public offering, which they succeeded in doing. My share would've been worth $16 million but of course I never got that. I've got no complaints – I did really well from videogames!"

In much the same way as the legendary city of Atlantis succumbed to a cataclysmic event, Imagic was devastated by the infamous videogame crash of 1983 and soon sank without trace. Dennis continued in the industry enjoyed great success with such games as *Sonic Spinball* and the *PGA Tour Golf* series but we wondered how he felt about his first big hit?

"It's funny because whenever I see one of my old games, it's like someone else made it," says Dennis. "I look at *Atlantis* and think 'Oh that's a nice touch' or 'Oooh that could be better'. I know objectively I made it, but it doesn't feel like that. It's like I'm talking about it in the third person. Maybe authors and musicians feel the same way about their old work. It kind of takes on a life of its own. If you've had a hit, it goes its way and you go yours..." ✱

> "WE SOLD TWO MILLION COPIES OF ATLANTIS AT $30 EACH. THE NUMBERS WERE STAGGERING!"
> DENNIS KOBLE

» [Atari 2600] Imagic produced a TV commercial for *Atlantis*, an indication of the rude health the videogame business was in at the time.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

SILK WORM

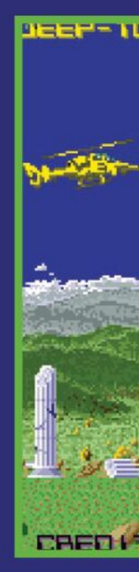
While two-player simultaneous arcade games were common by the end of the Eighties, there were none quite like Silkworm. With its blend of contemporary and futuristic art, the Tecmo game flew under the radar despite a number of excellent home ports

Words by **Graeme Mason**

The helicopter has provided plenty of arcade videogame shooting thrills over the years, from the search-and-rescue antics of Brøderbund's *Choplifter* to Irem's *Mr Heli* and Toaplan's *Twin Cobra*. Meanwhile, on the ground, vehicles such as an armoured car (*BreakThru*, 1986) and Jeep (Konami's *Jackal*, also 1986) were entertaining gamers to a lesser degree. With co-op two-player games proving popular, it was at Tecmo where someone hit upon the idea of combining these two types of weaponised transport into a unique shoot-'em-up that was very different when played with a friend.

Silkworm's plot is as rudimentary as you might expect for an Eighties shoot-'em-up. The evil MH-C2 super computer has gone bonkers and is threatening to enslave the world; it's up to you to jump into the seat of an attack helicopter and/or Jeep and take on its mass of defences. The long and sleek chopper can take out flying enemies with its forward horizontal machine gun and ground forces with its downwards cannon fire. Alternatively, the agile Jeep is able to leap over ground hazards, such as mines and digger trucks and has an arsenal of its own thanks to the little person manning a rear-mounted machine gun. While not able to move about the battlefield as fluidly as the helicopter, the Jeep has the very useful ability to fire backwards. Boy, will it come in handy.

The *Silkworm* arcade cabinet does its job as efficiently as the game. The marquee displays the two starring vehicles, firing their respective weapons at the game name to the right with the bezel surrounding the screen depicting a scene from the game in a cartoon style. Beneath the screen, housed in the Tecmo-embossed control panel sits the twin set of controls. The helicopter is guided around the screen using its eight-way joystick, with fire buttons for machine gun and cannon. Pressing the button atop the stick engages strafing mode, which is useful for taking out ground opponents should the Jeep need assistance. The



TWIN

POWER-UP

» [Arcade] This sleek aircraft carrier launches planes against the players.

» [Arcade] These descending tanks can be hazardous to the Jeep.

» [Arcade] Fragile-looking ancient ruins provide the backdrop for wave six.

» [Arcade] The final wave takes place inside the enemy computer.

"I didn't know anything about the game and had never seen it in the arcades"
NED LANGMAN

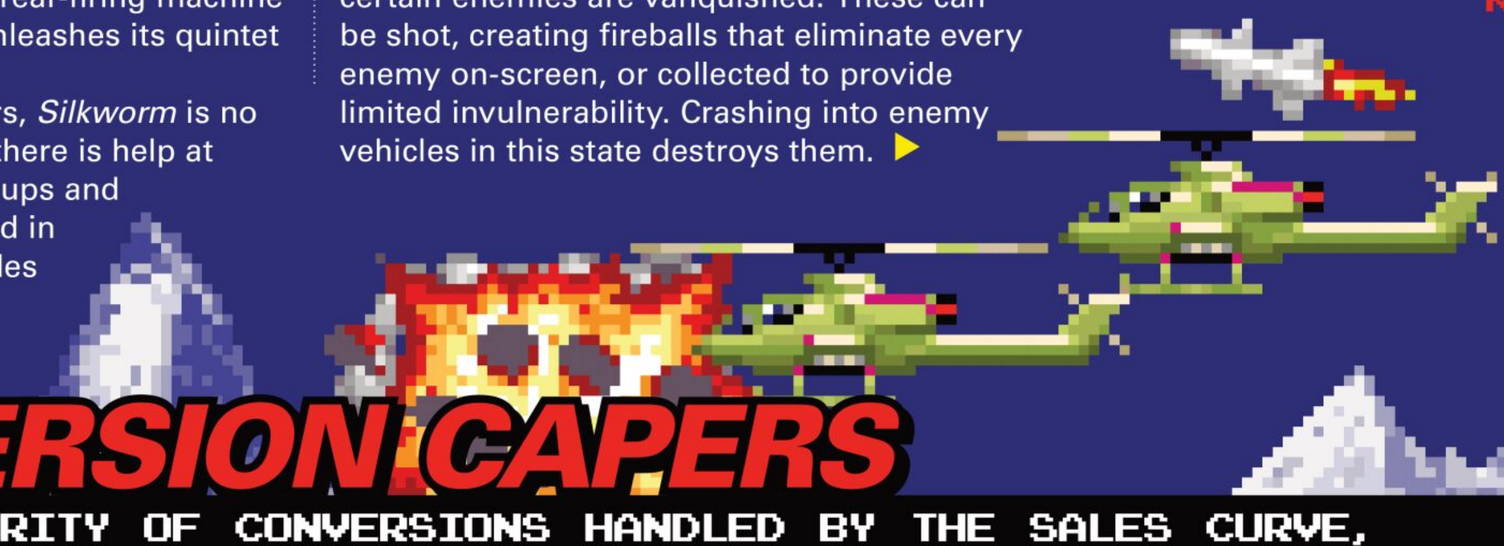
▶ Jeep controls are different in that the second button engages its jump while the joystick button sends control to the rotational machine gun, enabling a useful 180 degrees of fire.

***Silkworm* scrolls horizontally, with enemies massing chiefly from the right of the screen, but also from above and behind, and their variety reflects the diversity of the player vehicles.** Jets, choppers and missile launchers primarily threaten the helicopter while contact with glowing mines, digger trucks and rolling steel balls will destroy the Jeep. As a result, when in two-player mode, *Silkworm* requires a level of co-operation rarely seen at the time in arcade games. Some objects, such as the mines, can be jumped over in the Jeep but more easily destroyed by the helicopter. Stubby tanks, dropped in by parachute, are generally harmless to the chopper player, but zoom dangerously across the ground once landed. Again, it's up to the chopper player to take as many of these out as possible as it's unlikely the Jeep will be able to destroy or jump over all of them should they reach terra firma. Conversely, ground-based units such as the multi-missile launcher sometimes appear to the left of the screen. These are extremely dangerous to flying vehicles and can only be eliminated with the Jeep's rear-firing machine gun, preferably before it unleashes its quintet of deadly missiles.

Yet even with two players, *Silkworm* is no easy mission. Fortunately there is help at hand in the form of power-ups and cells. The former are limited in number, and useful upgrades to the firepower of both helicopter and Jeep, acquired by disposing of a particular enemy known as the goose helicopter. After a certain amount of kills, a glowing red helicopter shape will appear to the right of the screen. Slowly, four pieces will circle from above and assemble, forming the goose helicopter, armed with forward-firing missiles. Essentially a mid-level boss, when destroyed, the goose drops power-ups for the players. On the early levels this is twin-fire or rapid fire; on the later levels the goose yields high score bonuses of 10,000 points and with extra lives 'generously' given at 50,000, 200,000 and 500,000 points, you'll need all the help you can get. Players can also use the sparkling power cells that appear when certain enemies are vanquished. These can be shot, creating fireballs that eliminate every enemy on-screen, or collected to provide limited invulnerability. Crashing into enemy vehicles in this state destroys them. ▶

» [Arcade] Shooting those sneaky enemies behind is the preserve of the Jeep.

"We couldn't get the art transferred so I did everything from scratch which means our version has a slightly different look"
NED LANGMAN



CONVERSION CAPERS

WITH THE MAJORITY OF CONVERSIONS HANDLED BY THE SALES CURVE, SILKWORM RECEIVED SOME NOTABLE HOME PORTS. BUT WHICH WAS THE BEST?

AMIGA

Silkworm is not only one of the best arcade conversions on the Commodore machine – it's also one of the Amiga's best horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-ups full stop. With its smaller, yet still detailed sprites, fantastic crunchy sound effects and smooth gameplay, this is a port that even nudges the original in terms of playability. Containing all the levels, enemies and features, the compulsive two-player co-op game is just as good, making this the perfect way to play *Silkworm* at home.

AMSTRAD CPC

While a little slower than its home port brethren, the Amstrad game is still a triumph and another superb game. The most significant alteration is the absence of any notable backdrops, with the space-like vistas lending the game an ethereal off-world vibe. That slower pace makes for a considered and satisfying experience, however, and together with the sharp sprites, there's still plenty to enjoy in this well-programmed conversion. As with the Spectrum game, a single player can control both vehicles.

ATARI ST

While not quite up to par with its 16-bit cousin the Amiga, this is nonetheless another great little shoot-'em-up, professionally converted from the arcade original. The smaller sprites of the other versions are present again – luckily – and while the sound tends to let the side down a touch, there's enough frantic and compulsive shooting action to make it one of the better arcade conversions on the Atari ST. Another winner for sure.

» [Arcade] Taking out the evil computer in *Silkworm*'s feverish finale.

DEVELOPER INTERVIEW

RETRO GAMER TALKS SILKWORM WITH NED LANGMAN, PART OF THE ART TEAM BEHIND SEVERAL OF THE POPULAR HOME CONVERSIONS

Had you played the original arcade game?
I didn't know anything about the game and had never seen it in the arcades. I just remember the arcade machine showing up in the office one day and us spending far too long playing it – it was highly addictive, and the fact that two players had different vehicles was very original and appealing. From an artistic point of view, the look of the game was kinda quirky. At first glance, it looked like a standard war-themed game such as *1942*, but the vehicles had this slightly strange, stylised look to them.

Which versions of *Silkworm* did you work on?
I did the graphics for all versions except the Spectrum. Ron Pieket coded the Amiga version, John Croudy the ST and Warren Mills the Commodore 64. Of course, as much as I love the 64, the Amiga was a superior machine, so that version got most of my attention!

How did you go about copying the graphics?
I was provided with a VHS tape of the game, mainly to prevent me playing the arcade game all day long! We couldn't get the art transferred so I did everything from scratch which means our version has a slightly different look. But I was as faithful as I could be although we altered the aspect ratio to make it more widescreen as the arcade game was very square which meant there wasn't much room to see ahead. Our next game was *Ninja Warriors* where we had to do the opposite – squash a three-screen wide game into one screen!

The backgrounds are very atmospheric and beautiful. Do you have a favourite?
Oh yes, the desert Wild West one with the pinkish sky and large rock formations. It was minimalist but colourful. I also love the sunset level, and they both had a good contrast between the scenery and the sprites – in some of the daytime levels, the sprites got a bit lost against the bright background.

How did *Silkworm* inspire the later *SWIV*?
Silkworm was a surprise hit, so Jane Cavanagh [Sales Curve boss] gave myself and Ron the green light for a follow-up. We wanted to keep the Jeep and heli aspect but didn't have rights to *Silkworm*, so instead of a sideways scroller we went for vertical.

How pleased were you with the final game?
It's funny, we could tell it was going to do well just because we enjoyed playing it so much in the office. The Amiga version especially was so smooth and fluid, and with the cool explosion sounds that Ronald made, it was very satisfying setting off those smart bombs. It's definitely a game I'm very proud to have been part of.

Anything else you can recall about *Silkworm* that will interest readers?
There's a funny little detail about the original arcade game that always puzzled me. There's a digital countdown that, when it reaches zero, triggers a helicopter that gives pickups when destroyed. For some reason, the digits are in hexadecimal – it was as though the game was unfinished. Was it an in-joke? Or was there meant to be a shrinking graphic bar instead, and for some reason it showed up as numerical? We even kept it the same for the Amiga version. Very odd!

C64

■ This is another slick and fun port of *Silkworm* and the only 8-bit home computer version that retains the rocky background graphics – which ironically sometimes causes issues with bullets merging into the scenery. But it again moves, scrolls and controls well, and is huge fun to play, despite a lack of frills. There's no decent tune, although this is offset with some burly sound effects. Overall, another fine home conversion of the Tecmo shoot-'em-up.

NES

■ Released a year after the other conversions by American Sammy Corporation, the NES game expands on the practically non-existent plot of *Silkworm* with a story of a Skynet-esque world domination by the MH-C2 computer. The game itself is graphically bland in places, but moves adeptly and with its unusual co-op mode, is one of the better shoot-'em-ups on the Nintendo 8-bit console. There's also a decent recreation of the *Silkworm* tune, although it's debatable whether that's a plus point or not.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Selecting keyboard for both vehicles gives Speccy *Silkworm* another dimension as one player controls both the helicopter and Jeep, creating a deadly blaze of fire at your fingertips. The black and white main display is nicely complemented by some colourful ground and border graphics and it all moves at an impressively fast pace. Inevitably there are fewer enemies and no backgrounds, but this doesn't detract from another otherwise tremendous conversion.

SMOOTH AS SILK

MASTER TECMO'S GAME WITH THESE HANDY TIPS

PLAYING THE GOOSE GAME

While not terribly dangerous on its own, the goose chopper can be troublesome if it appears at an inopportune moment. But there's a neat trick you can use to take it down quicker and maximise the bonus. The second piece that flies in is vulnerable to your fire. Shoot it enough and it explodes, yielding two bonuses per player rather than one.

THEY CAME FROM BEHIND

Some enemies, such as the missile launcher in this picture, sneak up behind the player. While the helicopter cannot destroy this vehicle and must dodge its five missiles, the Jeep can rotate its gun backwards and let loose hot lead. However, with the Jeep then vulnerable to frontal attack, some air support would be a thoughtful gesture.

STRAFE AWAY

The helicopter's joystick-mounted fire button engages strafe mode. With this pressed, the chopper can more comfortably attack foes on the ground using its front-mounted machine gun. This is especially helpful when the Jeep is taking out foes to the rear and requires a little extra protection up front.

CO-OP OR DIE

When playing with another player, dutiful co-operation between the helicopter and Jeep is a must. Take these medium-sized tanks for instance. Should too many of them land, the Jeep is swamped, and unlikely to find a clean patch of ground. Instead, use the helicopter to eliminate as many as possible before they become too dangerous.

HOMING IN WITH MISSILES

As if things weren't tough enough, some missile launchers spit projectiles that initially home in on the chopper's position. Watch them carefully as they launch and dodge them as quickly as possible; after one successful evasion they will continue on past the player and can be safely ignored.

ENEMY MINE

These small pulsating explosives pepper the early levels and can be lethal for the Jeep. They're easily destroyed by the chopper's cannon in particular, and there's a nice bonus for doing so. Each one yields a very handy power cell which can be picked up for either invulnerability or a smart bomb.

» [Arcade] Helping each other out as things get hectic is key to survival.

THE BIG POWER CELL

Effective use of the star-like power cells is vital if you're to proceed far into enemy territory. When one appears, a split-second decision needs to be made: do you collect it for temporary invincibility or shoot it to destroy every enemy on screen? It's an instant evaluation that can drastically alter the direction of battle.

SOMEBODY CALL I.T.

The final level, 11, is actually followed by an unending 12th wave. It's also different graphically to the previous ten, taking place inside the MH-C2 super computer. The hordes of enemies are ramped up even more, especially as the players approach the computer itself as it summons a huge mass of vehicles to protect it. Get terminating!

Silkworm's levels (or waves as Tecmo's game describes them) take place over various unremarkable rural scenes. Wave one presents a rocky mountain backdrop with rolling green hills, ruined forests and dilapidated roads. This theme continues into the second wave with the mountains now further in the distance and multiple craggy outcrops, usually containing missile launchers. Soon the player is traversing what looks like a Middle-Eastern desert (wave four) and ancient ruins (five). But save for a destructible wall halfway through the fifth level, interaction with the scenery is minimal, despite this natural beauty. And the most gorgeous of all these vistas is undoubtedly wave seven's dramatic sunset over those persistent mountains, the red clouds an apt setting to the foreground's bedlam.

Despite its relative obscurity, *Silkworm* was picked up for home conversion by Virgin Games in 1989, with the recently-formed The Sales Curve developing most of the ports under its in-house development name, Random Access. 8-bit and 16-bit home computer games appeared, and in a rare occurrence for arcade conversions, *Silkworm* reviewed well over every format. Finally, a year later, another excellent game appeared, this time on the NES by American Sammy Corporation. But it is with The Sales Curve (soon to become SCi in 1994) where the story of *Silkworm* continued. Enthused by the success of the shoot-'em-up, Sales Curve boss Jane Cavanagh asked developers Ned Langman and Ronald Pieket to investigate a follow-up without the need for an official licence. Keeping the original helicopter and Jeep, the pair switched the game to overhead and vertically-scrolling, and the result was *SWIV*, another hit, albeit one with tenuous links to the arcade original. Whether the condensed title stands for 'Silkworm In Vertical', 'Silkworm IV' or 'Special Weapons Interdiction Vehicles', the series continued throughout the Nineties in this fashion, thrilling shoot-'em-up fans on the 16-bit machines in particular.

Yet back in the arcades, with its diverse pairing of helicopter and Jeep, *Silkworm* adeptly combines two very different types of player vehicle for unbridled co-op mayhem. It may lack the spectacular bosses of its peers – there are only two end-of-level enemies, and they are notably easy to defeat – or the variety of power-ups and music. However, thanks to a novel semi-sci-fi aesthetic, uncomplicated and hectic gameplay and, of course, that unique co-operative mode, this is one of many arcade shoot-'em-ups that perhaps deserved a little more attention than it received. And with co-op play bigger today than ever, there's never been a better time to jump into that chopper or Jeep and help a friend liberate the world from the terror of Skynet wannabe, MH-C2. ✱

"It's definitely a game I'm very proud to have been part of"
NED LANGMAN

4.325km

F1

VA VA VROOM

RETROREVIVAL

» Atari ST » 1993 » Lankhor

I'm not really the sort of person to buy hardware blind, but not long after I started on Retro Gamer, I got the opportunity to pick up an Atari ST and just jumped at it. I made the decision, sent the email and then set about learning what I could actually play on the thing. What I quickly learned was that in most cases, the games I knew as Amiga classics were generally on the ST and loved by its fans too. I did also learn that it tended to have a bit of an advantage with 3D games due to its faster CPU, but before long I found myself simply indulging in one of my genre preferences by looking at racing games.

This was how I discovered that *F1* was not the Mega Drive original that I had always assumed it to be, but a game with a history that I was wholly unaware of. *F1* was the ultimate evolution of *Vroom*, with more tracks and an official licence to set it apart from its predecessors. This was no bad thing, mind – I had loved the Mega Drive game, which was a favourite rental, and the ST version just looked to be that little bit smoother when it came to the actual racing. As far as I was concerned, this game absolutely made the ST look like a million bucks compared to some of the other games I'd seen, and I was happy that I was getting the computer.

For many, *Formula One Grand Prix* will be the game that satisfies their need for Formula One on the ST, and I totally understand that – the fully 3D tracks in Geoff Crammond's game really are mightily impressive. But for me, I learned that I'd gladly take *F1*'s approach of using sprites alongside fewer, more simplistic polygon objects if it meant that I could have just a slightly better frame rate. Both games are fantastic though, so I'd definitely have been a happy racer had I owned an ST in the early Nineties.

Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

MEGA DRIVE

Powered by blast processing and serious attitude, Sega's fourth-generation Mega Drive split the console wars wide open. Here are some of its best-kept 16-bit secrets that only the really cool kids knew about

Words by Hareth Al Bustani

» [Mega Drive] With intuitive controls, even the game's more challenging platforming sections are great fun, breaking up the pace between arcade sequences.

» [Mega Drive] *Pulseman*'s memorable characters, gameplay and world were meticulously crafted by the creative geniuses behind the *Pokémon* franchise.

PULSEMAN

■ DEVELOPER: **GAME FREAK** ■ YEAR: **1994**

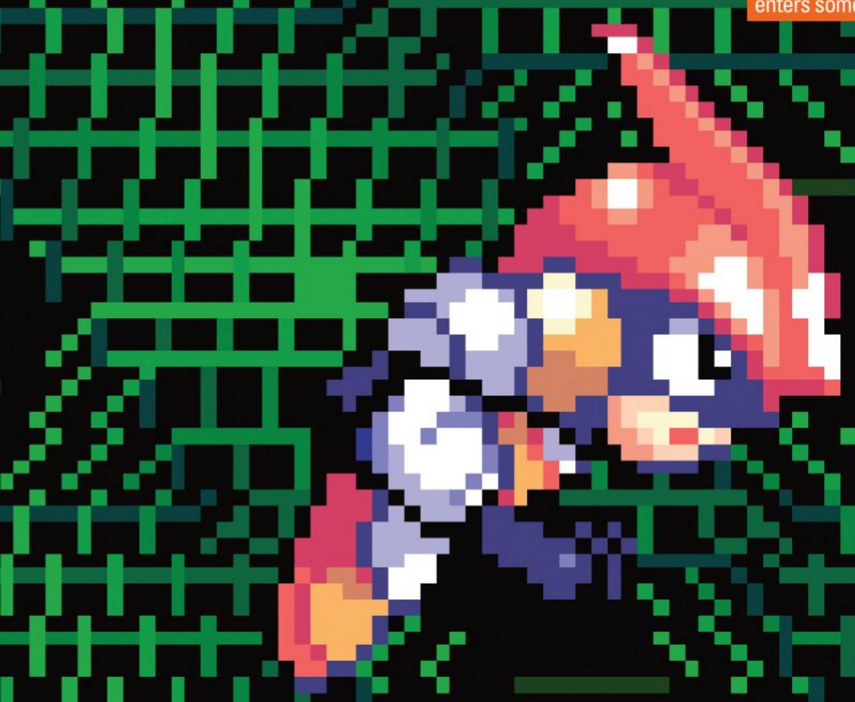
■ **After completing the manga-adaptation, *Magical Taluluto-Kun*, Satoshi Tajiri and Ken Sugimori – soon to become world-famous as the creators of the *Pokémon* franchise – decided to design an original title together.** As the next generation of consoles reared its head, they wanted to produce something that would raise the bar that the spiky blue hedgehog had set years earlier. The result was *Pulseman*, a high-voltage platformer, overflowing with creativity, engaging gameplay and some of the console's most beautiful visuals ever. One of the last games developed for the Mega Drive, and the duo's last before *Pokémon* transformed them into international superstars, it was a masterpiece, pushing the console's capabilities to the very limit.

The story begins with the scientist, Doc Yoshiyama, creating the world's most advanced AI, called C-Life. After falling in love with her, Yoshiyama integrates himself into his core and they reproduce, creating the hybrid creature, Pulseman – capable of channelling electricity through his body. However, when Yoshiyama goes mad, creating a cyber-terror organisation called Team Galaxy, only Pulseman can put a stop to his creator's manic rampage.

The game kicks off in a stunning Japanese cityscape, with Pulseman electrifying his way through a series of enemies and puzzles. Pulseman charges up his attacks by running from left to right, allowing him to fire bursts of electricity through his foes. When fully charged, he can launch an explosive Volteccer attack, bouncing around like an electric pinball, eviscerating everything in sight. This power also allows him to tap into wires and electrical grids, which leads to some truly surreal platforming sequences, where Pulseman navigates his way through circuits.

Designed on the cusp of the internet explosion, the game tapped into a futurist vision of the world. Despite its high-paced action, it was clearly distinguished from the *Sonic* franchise. While Sonic zipped around loops at breakneck speed, Pulseman darted in rectangular patterns with sudden and snappy moves between electricity lines. While the character himself was inspired by the *Power Rangers*-style super sentai genre, with influences from manga and anime, the gameplay feels like a

» [Mega Drive] As Pulseman navigates his way through circuit boards and electricity lines, the game enters some seriously trippy platforming sections.



» [Mega Drive] Pulseman's signature move, the Volteccer isn't just great for obliterating enemies; it also lets him tap into electricity grids.

cross between the best elements of *Sonic* and *Mega Man*.

The game starts simply, building its difficulty level in a perfectly intuitive fashion. Stunning visuals are matched with sizzling sound design, helping to bring the duo's effortlessly immersive world to life. As the game reaches a crescendo, it becomes increasingly challenging, but in a way that hooks, rather than frustrates. Hard-earned victories are satisfying, and the visuals at times explode into psychedelic technological futurist mayhem, with remarkable perception-distorting animations hammering the world home even further. Although Game Freak would soon embark on its incredible *Pokémon* adventure, Pulseman remains one of its finest titles.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

TINY TOON ADVENTURES – BUSTER'S HIDDEN TREASURE

KONAMI, 1993

■ The console's first *Tiny Toon Adventures* title, *Buster's Hidden Treasure* is a superb little *Super Mario World*-style platformer, complete with beautifully large sprites, varied backgrounds and – crucially, for the genre – seamless controls. Some consider it one of the console's finest platformers.

ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES

KONAMI, 1993

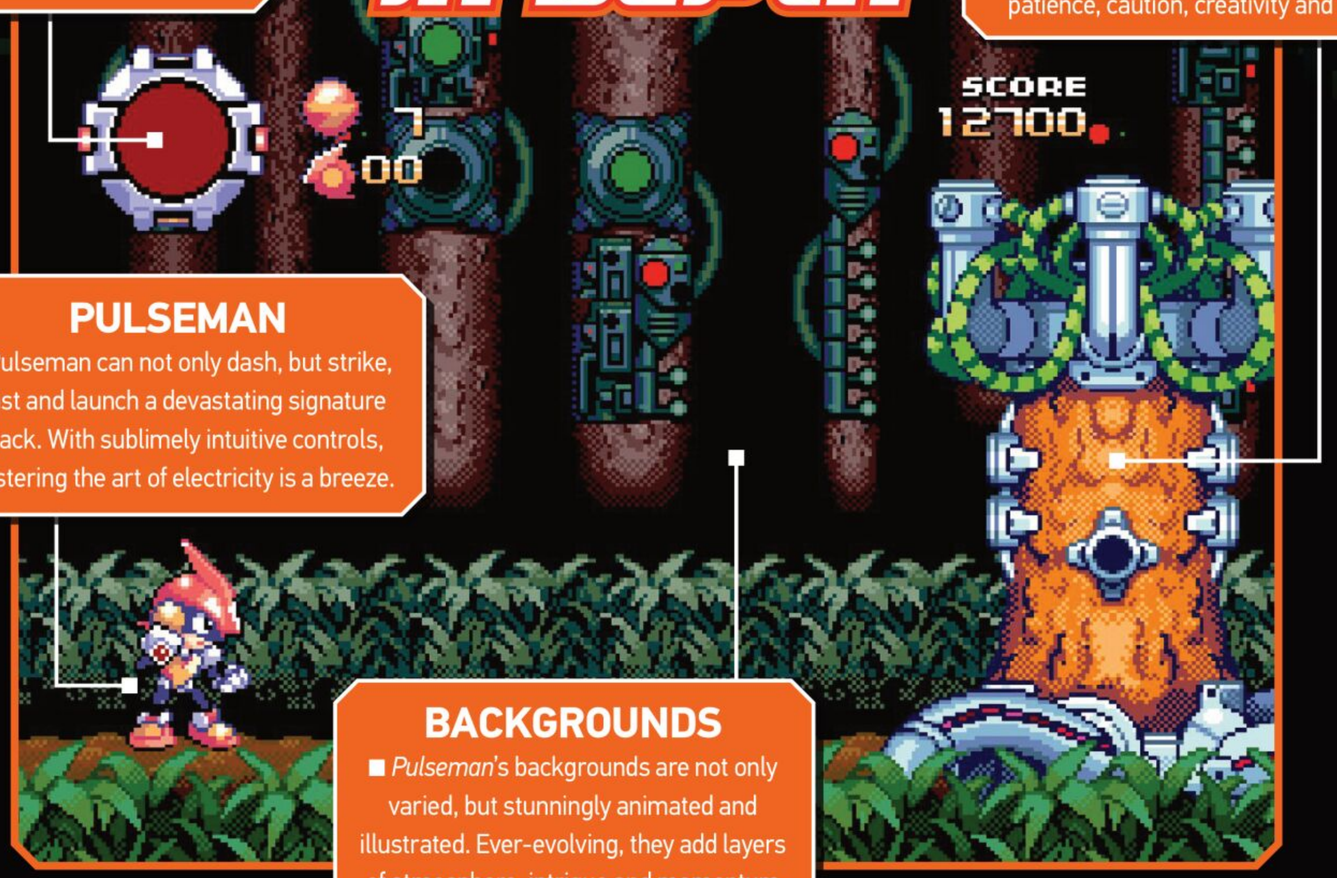
■ This classic Konami side-scroller is an absolute riot. Players control an opossum knight called Sparkster, armed with a jet pack and a sword – a match made in heaven. Jam-packed with chaotic charm, quirky enemies and hilarious gameplay, this is some of the most fun you'll have on a Mega Drive.

SOCKET

VIC TOKAI, 1993

■ This platformer stars Socket, a robotic duck sent in to stop the Time Dominator from destroying the space/time continuum. Although it very much puts the 'clone' in '*Sonic* clone', and Socket isn't quite the mascot Sonic is, the title gets enough right to make a fun addition to the genre.

IN DEPTH



INTERFACE

■ The large circle indicate Pulseman's health. Next to this, are two smaller circles, indicating how many 'spark balls' – collected for extra lives – and spare lives Pulseman has.

BOSSES

■ Bosses all follow their own patterns, and often mix them up halfway through fights. Defeating them requires an abundance of patience, caution, creativity and timing.

PULSEMAN

■ Pulseman can not only dash, but strike, blast and launch a devastating signature attack. With sublimely intuitive controls, mastering the art of electricity is a breeze.

BACKGROUNDS

■ *Pulseman*'s backgrounds are not only varied, but stunningly animated and illustrated. Ever-evolving, they add layers of atmosphere, intrigue and momentum to the breakneck adventure.

Minority Report

HERZOG ZWEI

■ DEVELOPER: **TECHNOSOFT** ■ YEAR: **1989**

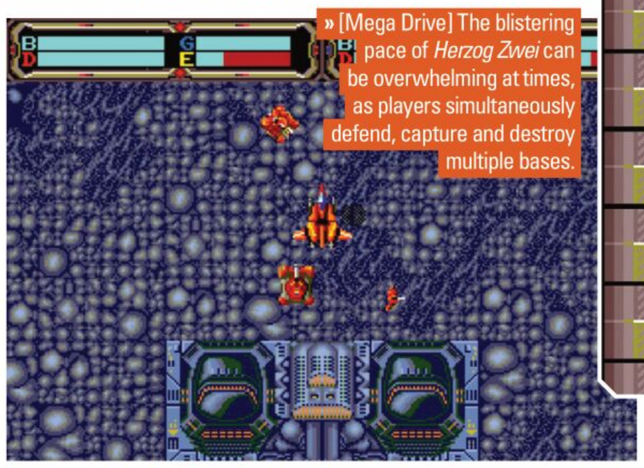
■ **Every once in a while, a game comes along that is so visionary, not even grizzled critics know what to make of it.** At its core, *Herzog Zwei* was an action arcade-strategy hybrid, spread over a series of stylised maps. However, as one of the Mega Drive's earlier releases, giving too much too soon, it landed not so much with a splash, but a muted plop.

Rather than simply blasting through missions, players use a transforming mech, called the Land-Armor, to build units – ranging from soldiers to tanks and attack boats to artillery – and order them around the battlefield. In order to win, players must simultaneously defend their bases, while capturing new ones, to eventually overwhelm the enemy. And when armchair generals challenged their friends to multiplayer split-screen battles, the game soared to intensely chaotic new heights.

Gamers at the time had experienced the slower tactical game, *Modem Wars*, before, but this was something else. It not only transcended into the realm of grand strategy, but with the action coming in hard and fast, pioneered the real-time strategy genre. Some critics, confused about not being able to simply fly around blasting everything to pieces, walked away thinking it was just a bad shooter.

Hitting the Mega Drive even before *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Herzog Zwei* was simply a little too far ahead of its time, leaving critics scratching their heads. However, in the years since, it has gained cult status, hailed by many as one of the console's greatest ever titles. Although it paved the way for all RTS titles to come, such as *Dune II: Battle for Arrakis*, *Warcraft* and *Command & Conquer*, it remains quite unlike any game that came before, or since.

» [Mega Drive] A little too far ahead of its time, some critics overlooked the game's emphasis on strategy, misconstruing it as a bad shooter.



» [Mega Drive] The blistering pace of *Herzog Zwei* can be overwhelming at times, as players simultaneously defend, capture and destroy multiple bases.

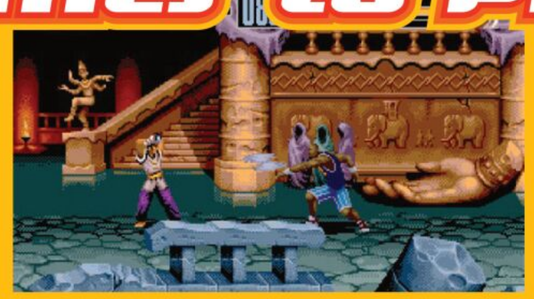
» [Mega Drive] *Herzog Zwei* not only allows players to build a variety of units, but to issue an elaborate set of commands to each.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY

» TINY TOON ADVENTURES: ACME ALL-STARS

■ DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**
■ YEAR: **1994**

■ *Tiny Toon*'s finest take part in an array of minigames, including basketball, soccer, bowling, an obstacle course race and whack-a-mole. The title really comes into its own in the basketball and soccer modes, where characters can whip out truly dastardly special moves, such as Montana Max mowing people down in his luxury car.



» SHAQ FU

■ DEVELOPER: **DELPHINE SOFTWARE INTERNATIONAL**
■ YEAR: **1994**

■ *Shaq Fu* is one of those games that is now considered cool to hate. However, at the time critics thought this was a pretty good fighter, and some even raved about it. Of course, the concept itself is pretty barmy: basketball superstar Shaquille O'Neal takes on his very own version of *Mortal Kombat*. However, while the small sprites take some getting used to, they allow for some uniquely high-speed slugfests.

» GENERAL CHAOS

■ DEVELOPER: **GAME REFUGE INC**
■ YEAR: **1993**

■ Merging RTS elements with chaotic arcade action, this is an absolute riot. As General Havoc wages war on General Chaos, players pick a team of five specialist soldiers, and duke it out on an array of battlefields. Whether blasting the enemy to pieces, barbecuing them, pumping them full of lead or pummelling them to the ground, the results are hilariously fun. Throw EA's 4-Way Play adaptor into the mix, and you've got a party.

» WIZ 'N' LIZ

■ DEVELOPER: **RAISING HELL SOFTWARE**
■ YEAR: **1993**

■ Who knew wunning about wescuing wabbits could be so much fun? A feast for the senses, this whacky platformer from Psygnosis stars Wiz and Liz, sorcerers from planet Pum. Curiously, unlike most platformers, aside from the occasional boss fight, there aren't any enemies. Instead, the wizards fight the clock, zipping around saving wabbits, grabbing letters to form magic words and mixing fruit to concoct helpful, or humorous, spells.

STORMLORD

■ DEVELOPER: **HEWSON CONSULTANTS (PORTED FROM AMIGA BY PUNK DEVELOPMENT)** ■ YEAR: **1990**

■ **On the surface, *Stormlord* seems like a fairly typical fantasy platformer.** Designed by Raffaele Cecco – hot on the heels of his trilogy of Spectrum hits – *Stormlord* is set in a world cast into darkness by the Evil Rotting Crone. Even worse, all of the realm's beloved fairies have been imprisoned, and it is up to the titular Stormlord, a hunky old wizardy-hermity-warrior dude, to rescue them. Armed with chiselled abs, epic beard, swords and magical throwing stars, the Stormlord butchers and thinks his way through Venus flytraps, demons, chess pawns, horses and even rain.

Dodging dangers and liberating fairies, Stormlord also makes use of strategic items, luring bees away with pots of honey, and summoning falcons to drag him around. The game is brought to life with colourful visuals and a fabulously bizarre bonus round, where Stormlord shoots kisses at fairies, breaking their hearts and collecting their salty tears.

One of Sega's early Mega Drive licensees, publisher Razorsoft, caused a bit of a storm with this infamous title. The original Amiga version featured naked fairies, which Sega forced the team to cover up for the Mega Drive version. After the game was published, the companies ended up suing one another over Razorsoft's decision to produce its own cartridges, rather than buying them from Sega.

» [Mega Drive] Publisher, Razorsoft, initially got in trouble with Sega, for its inclusion of raunchy naked fairies, long before the two ended up in court.

» [Mega Drive] From luring bees away with honey, to hurling swords at goblins, the game is filled with arcade action and platforming puzzles alike.

RETRO JUNKED

» INSTRUMENTS OF CHAOS STARRING YOUNG INDIANA JONES

■ LUCASARTS ■ 1994

■ This game's stunning graphics, sound and animations only make the awful gameplay more disappointing. Trying to control Indy is like cracking a bullwhip underwater. Don't get us started on the snakes.

» TAZ-MANIA

■ DEVELOPER: **RECREATIONAL BRAINWARE**
■ YEAR: **1992**

■ Join everyone's favourite maniac, Taz, as he spins his way across desert, forest and ice, in search of the mythical valley of giant Seabird eggs. With stunning visuals, huge sprites and gags-a-minute, the game is a faithful representation of the beloved cartoon. Facing varied enemies, Taz has plenty of power-ups available – eating chilli peppers gives him fiery breath, while a runaway mine cart throws a tricky spanner in the works.

» TECHNO COP

■ DEVELOPER: **GRAY MATTER, IMAGEXCEL**
■ YEAR: **1990**

■ Before getting into a spot of bother for its naked fairies, Razorsoft published one of the first Mega Drive games to have a parental warning. *Techno Cop* is like a cross between *Robocop* and *Mad Max*, with players first driving to tenement complexes and then raiding them with guns blazing. Although the aim is to capture criminals alive, the controversial title not only lets players kill civilians, but has enemies exploding into clouds of gore.

» MUTANT LEAGUE FOOTBALL

■ DEVELOPER: **MUTANT PRODUCTIONS**
■ YEAR: **1993**

■ In *Mutant League Football*, like its real-world counterpart, America's beloved sport becomes a vehicle for violence. However, instead of the Cowboys or the Steelers, you play as mutants, aliens, skeletons, robots and trolls. Pitches are littered with landmines, and athletes routinely maul one another into gory pieces. Referees can be bribed – but if caught, will most likely be battered to death. In other words, it's dead good.

» GROWL

■ DEVELOPER: **TAITO**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ Despite the lack of multiplayer, there's some serious Konami T*eenage Mutant Ninja Turtle* vibes with this one. Released as *RunArk* in Japan, this beat-'em-up stars a group of macho dudes tasked with murdering every poacher in their path. Whether bullwhipping swarms of overdressed businesswomen in the face, hurling grenades at mobs of dieselpunk bikers, or liberating lions and watching them maul their captors, it's all in the name of a good cause.

Hardware Heaven

TurboDuo

» **MANUFACTURER:** NEC » **YEAR:** 1992
» **COST:** $299 (launch), £850+ (today, boxed), £300+ (today, unboxed)

In 1991, NEC released the PC Engine Duo to the Japanese market, which gave players the option to purchase the system with an integrated CD-ROM drive for the first time, at the relatively high price of ¥59,800. One year later, this model was introduced to the North American market with the goal of revitalising the flagging Turbografx scene – and it was *this* model, as the console was not redesigned in the way the PC Engine had been. The only major cosmetic difference was a new logo and a power button that was the same colour as the rest of the casing.

The addition of composite output was a nice upgrade over the RF-only output of the Turbografx 16, and the integration of the Super System Card 3.0 allowed almost all CD-ROM software to be played on the new machine. However, the adoption of the smaller Japanese controller port meant that older American Turbografx peripherals required an adaptor cable. Despite being cheaper than the Japanese model at the time, and cheaper than buying both a Genesis and Sega CD unit, a poor starting position and bizarre advertising starring Johnny Turbo meant that the system failed to turn the Turbografx brand around. ✱

TurboDuo fact

■ HuCards are region locked so you'll need an import device to play Japanese card games, but the CD-ROM games are region free with no workarounds of any kind required.

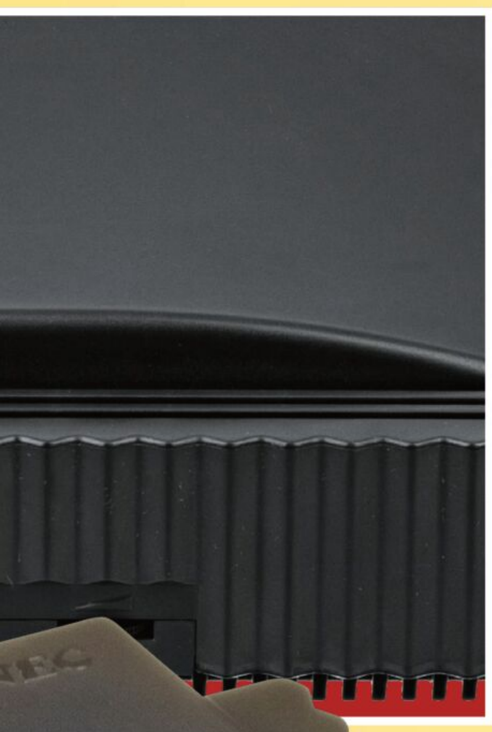
PROCESSORS: HUDSON SOFT HUC6280A 6502-BASED 8-BIT CPU (3.58 MHZ OR 7.16 MHZ)

RAM: 8KB MAIN MEMORY, 64KB VIDEO MEMORY, 192KB SUPER SYSTEM CARD MEMORY

GRAPHICS: HUDSON SOFT HUC6270A VDP, UP TO 512X242 DISPLAY (256X239 TYPICAL), 482 COLOURS FROM A PALETTE OF 512, 64 SPRITES ON SCREEN

AUDIO: SIX PSG CHANNELS, ONE ADPCM CHANNEL, CD AUDIO

MEDIA: HUCARD (UP TO 20 MEGABIT), CD-ROM (UP TO 650MB)



ESSENTIAL GAME
Gate Of Thunder

This was the pack-in game for the TurboDuo, and it encapsulates a lot of what makes the system so great – it's a very well constructed shoot-'em-up with an excellent CD soundtrack. Having been developed by former Technosoft staff, the game looks and plays very similarly to the Mega Drive classic *Thunder Force III*, and really pushes the system with some great visuals. If you can, try to pick up the North American release – *Bonk's Adventure* and *Bonk's Revenge* are included and *Bomberman* is there as a secret too, making it the perfect introduction for a newcomer to the console.

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

THE MAKING OF CIVILIZATION

EACH NEW VERSION OF CIVILIZATION COMES WITH NEW FEATURES, UPDATED MECHANICS AND ALL-NEW SYSTEMS TO LEARN, BETTER THAN BEFORE. SO WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THE DIFFICULT SECOND ALBUM THAT HAS HELPED CIV II TO STAND THE TEST OF TIME?

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1990

CIVILIZATION
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1991

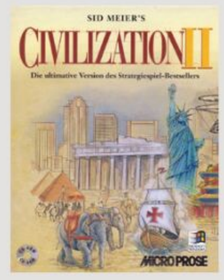
SID MEIER'S PIRATES! (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1993

When the original *Civilization* released back in 1991, there's no doubting the novelty, innovation and, of course, the compulsive just-one-more-turn appeal that it brought to videogames. It might not have had the wow factor that many games of the era would go on to inspire, but for gamers who preferred their games a little less dextrous and a little more contemplative, *Civ* was a revelation. It's with our rose-tinted view on the world of retro games that it's easy to think of the original as the true innovator, with the sequel often being overlooked for later games in the series that arguably improved on the formula tenfold to refine what *Civilization* – and by extension the 4X genre – could really be. But that's just it: *Civilization* may have given birth to Sid's strategy empire, but it was the sequel – created with minimal input from the iconic designer – that set the standards, mechanics and expectations for what exactly made a *Civilization* game. Everything that came since has been built upon the foundation that *Civ II* laid, and not the original game.

Naturally after the release and ensuing phenomenal success of the original, Microprose had at some point realised that a sequel to the original would need to be on the cards. Technology had advanced enough that vast improvements to the graphics could be made, as well as a greater depth of strategy, computation and AI – all of which were essential components to *Civilization*. "I had been at Microprose I guess about four or five years," says Doug Kaufman, who was originally working within the text adventure division of the company. "Brian Reynolds and I had been working on a game called *Dragonsphere* and about three quarters of the way through the development of that, they offered him the chance to be a programmer/designer with Sid to do *Colonization*."

> "SID DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO DO CIV II"
> DOUG KAUFMAN

As it turns out, this was a test: working closely with Sid, Brian would have the opportunity to prove he had the clout to lead a project. "Sid didn't really want to do *Civ II*," recalls Doug, suggesting that his pet project at that time was Microprose's *Magic: The Gathering*. "But he worked with Brian on *Colonization*, gave him some of his wisdom. I had finished with *Dragonsphere* and came in to help out with the final design for *Colonization*, they were having trouble with the endgame." Once it came time to move onto *Civ II*, the two developers had already proven their capabilities and were given the dream sequel, and Doug admits that he definitely had ideas about how to improve on the original. "I had obviously been a big board gamer from when I was working at Westend Games, and *Civilization* the board game, upon which the computer game was loosely based in terms of theme, had been one of my favourites. We would play it all the time in college and developed all kinds of strategies and variant rules, but the core of it – developing your tech tree and the very simplistic combat – was very attractive for us." Doug adds that when he arrived at Microprose, *Civilization* was already in late testing, so his involvement (and appreciation) of the game was purely as a fan of that type of strategic play. "Of course it had that DNA of *Civilization* the board game, so I enjoyed it, but there were certain things that always niggled at the back of my head."



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** MICROPROSE
- **DEVELOPER:** MICROPROSE
- **RELEASED:** 1996
- **PLATFORM:** WINDOWS
- **GENRE:** TURN-BASED STRATEGY

» [PC] The FMV-powered high council was a feature that didn't continue on from the sequel, but it was a memorable addition all the same.

ATION II®

» PC] The emphasis on borders, however invisible they were, led to a noticeable division of land as the game rolled on.

Chief among these was the lack of territorial control, since the original game suffered from players being able to dump their cities just about anywhere without any real challenge or concern. "The board game has these built-in territories," says Doug, "and you occupy just one city site for each one and it had a feeling of nations, and obviously that's what *Civilization* was meant to be and it didn't quite do that." This was why *Civilization II* added city limits, areas surrounding any civilization's cities that would limit actions on the player: units couldn't end a turn there without angering the opposing civs, and the resource tiles that were considered 'owned' by that faction. It was a crucial addition, and one that went on to become enhanced further in *Civ III* with visible

» [PC] The familiar sight of the start of any *Civilization* game: a lone settler surrounded by a black fog of frontiers and opportunities.

» Doug Kaufman has worked on such strategy hits as *Civilization II* and the definitive edition of *Age Of Empires III*.

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH VERSIONS CONQUERED?

PC Undoubtedly the main platform for the series, and the go-to default for years since. The PC version came bundled with online multiplayer, the best visuals and those players who had the CD in the drive could consult the live-action videos of the high council.

MAC Releasing a year after the PC version, the Mac port was equivalent in practically every sense. And since PC was beginning to dominate the gaming industry, at least from the home computer side, the release of a Mac version meant that strategy fans lapped it up. It was like-for-like in practically every way.

PS1 The *Civilization* series has always had a rocky relationship with consoles, what with the controller-based platforms generally not being as suited to strategy games of this ilk. However the simpler mechanics and controls of *Civ II* – at least when compared to later releases – meant that it was a rather successful port, even if it did have inferior graphics and a lower resolution.

TIME FOR EXPANSION

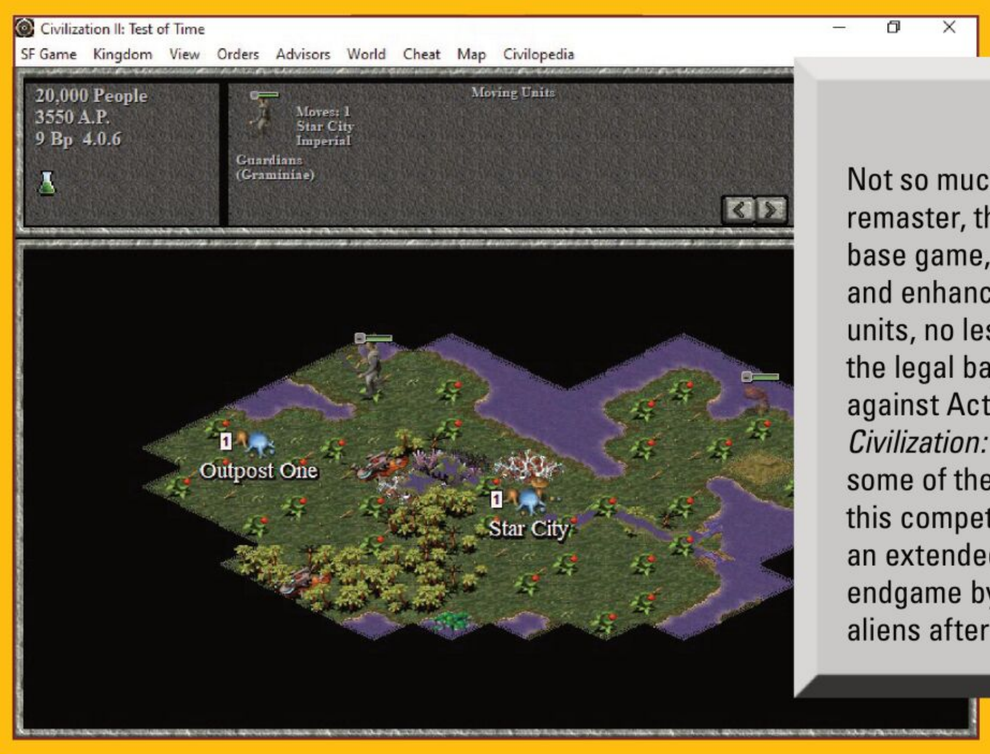
THE LATER ADD-ON PACKS FOR CIVILIZATION II

CONFLICTS IN CIVILIZATION

This was the first of the two expansion packs, adding in 20 new scenarios – 12 of which were from Microprose and the remaining eight being the 'Best of the Net' user-created scenarios. The expansion pack also massively and completely unnecessarily enhanced the options for scenario creation with an advanced macro language for custom scenarios and improved networking for multiplayer.

FANTASTIC WORLDS

As the name suggests, the scenarios added in the second expansion pack were much more fantastical, featuring dinosaurs, aliens, Viking gods and even *XCOM*-themed scenarios. An added scenario editor improved the tools to help players create their own, with robust tools like event triggers and unit balance editing.



TEST OF TIME

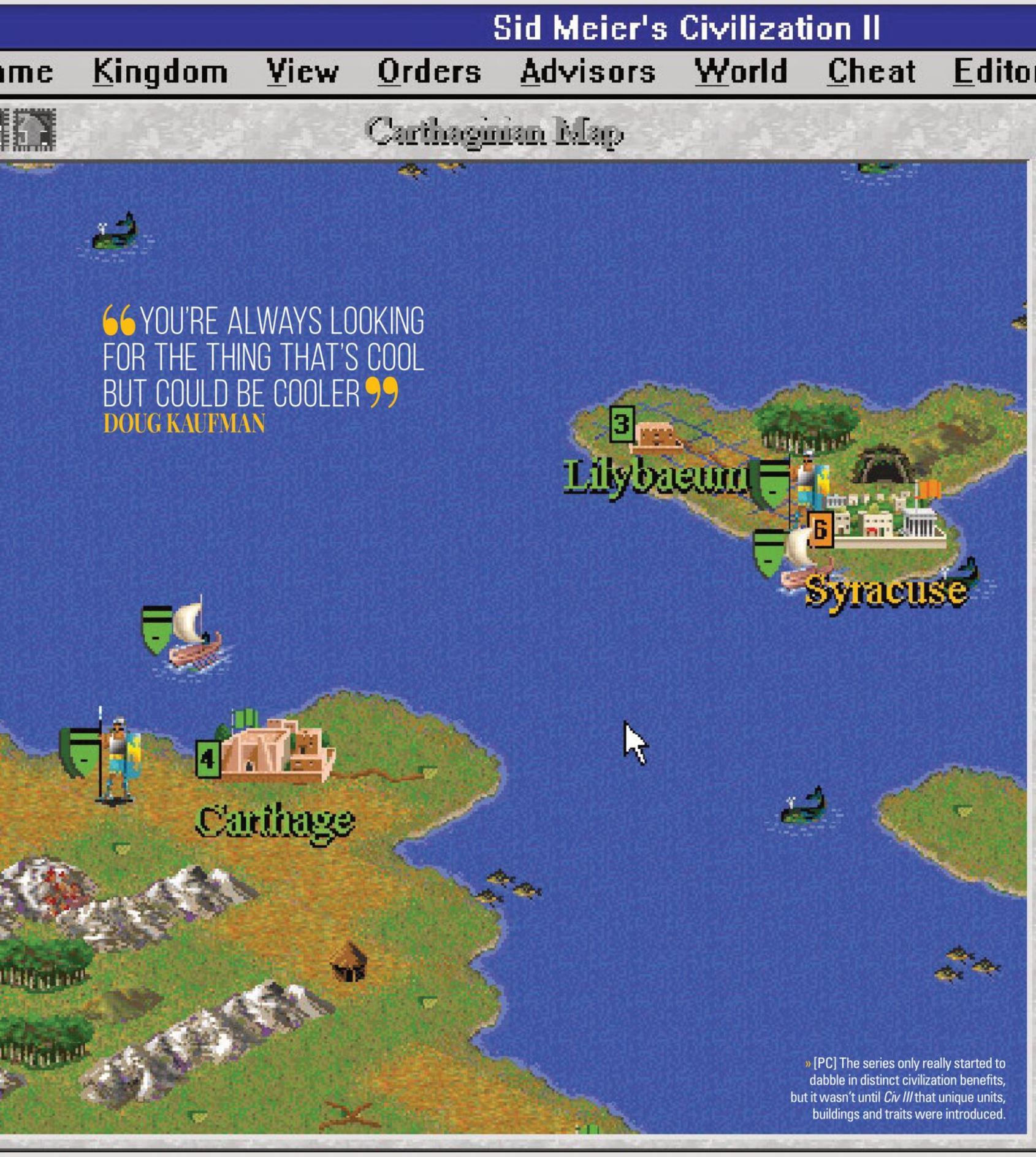
Not so much an expansion pack as a remaster, this 1999 release bundled in the base game, both previous expansion packs and enhanced graphics – with animated units, no less! This was a counter to the legal battle Microprose was facing against Activision, whose own 1999 game *Civilization: Rise To Power* tried to emulate some of the success of *Civ II*. Because of this competing game, *Test Of Time* included an extended campaign that added to the endgame by having players face off against aliens after reaching Alpha Centauri.

» [PC] The excitable hunt for technologies found inside abandoned villages was introduced in *Civ II*, and has been a franchise staple ever since.

▶ borders – a facet of the game that has been a staple ever since.

Combat, also, was another major niggle about the original that Doug wanted to address, specifically the fact that there was a slightest chance that incredibly unlikely situations could occur. "Essentially each unit had a combat factor, and you added them together and then the odds were based on the distribution of those combat factors." What this meant was that if a militia unit had a combat factor of 1 and a battleship had a combat factor of 100, then there was a 1 in 101 chance for that ancient-era militia unit to succeed against a modern-day destroyer. "Those 1 out of 101 times were very disturbing, you would whack the militia thinking you'd just get it out of the way and instead you lose your battleship, or you hurl militia at a battleship and by God, you destroy it with your ridiculous little armies."

There wasn't initially a clear idea of how to solve this particular problem, and while Brian and Doug had toyed with the idea of using hit points, they couldn't come up with a way that would effectively communicate the situation. "There were really no such things as UX designers in those days," adds Doug, "so we discarded that idea for a while until we came to a point in the tech tree where we were adding units, just fleshing it out more and getting more detail about the types of units that you could get." It was when they came to the musketeer unit that the designers stumbled upon a question that would ultimately lead them back to the idea of hit points, "Are they attack units or defence units? With the musketeers we were thinking about separate attack and defence factors or something like that, but how would you portray that to the player, do we put numbers on these things? We finally looked at each other and said 'You know, we have to do the hit points thing.'" The next question was how, and from there came the small green bar against two battling units that represented their hit points. "It was this big innovation at the time," laughs Doug, "where the musketeer could take *two* hits before it would die! And when you attacked a guy who had musketeers, it was really hard to break through the line, and you know, actually, it really changes the moment in the game, it's like the Renaissance and it changes the nature of warfare."



» [PC] The series only really started to dabble in distinct civilization benefits, but it wasn't until *Civ III* that unique units, buildings and traits were introduced.

» [PC] It's probably hard to look at now after years of UI improvements, but long-term players will be very familiar with this.

This was generally the approach that the two designers were taking with the design of the sequel, a sort of 'if it ain't broke' attitude that aimed to improve upon the original's core concept rather than rediscover the wheel, as it were. "*Civ I* was very iconic and ensconced and we knew we didn't want to make any horrific major changes," recalls Doug, adding that because of the love that the game had both internally at Microprose and as part of the games community, their "entire philosophy was always that we didn't want to change the game too much because people are used to it and the technology is only so much more advanced". With this in mind, the team as a whole targeted specific issues with the game, things that could be fixed or made even better to improve the experience. "We were looking for 20% of stuff that was dumb that we can get rid of, 20% of stuff that's cool that we wanted to enhance, and everything else stays the same. That's how we approached it philosophically."

While this meant the design process of the sequel was more iterative and freeform – and where ideas such as the hit point bars came from – what's interesting is that it's very similar to a quote attributed to Sid Meier in later years about how the franchise is approached with each new iteration, "One-third new, one-third improved and one-third removed." That's been the adage guiding the franchise case since *Civ II*, it seems.

"Each person in turn held this rule personally," explains Doug, "and you're always looking for the thing that's cool but could be cooler." What this meant was that the wider team were always coming up with suggestions for what it was that needed to be improved and what personal pain points needed to be discarded. And since everyone had their own approach and attitude towards these particulars, interesting suggestions could arise. "The palace is the obvious place to improve," says Doug, of the novel feature of the original game that allowed players to expand their throne room

» [PlayStation] The graphics and input were vastly different on PlayStation, but the 'tactics' RPG look about it did help it to fit into the PlayStation turn-based RPG scene.

» [PC] Before it became possible to see your city grow in 3D on the actual game map, the city-view screen offered a subtle sense of growth.

throughout the ages. "Coming in at the end of final testing for *Civ I*, the palace was the last thing to have been added into the game just to give the player a visual feedback to his progress, because there wasn't one otherwise, in terms of a feeling of a consolidated trophy case of some kind. But the palace was just slapped together, so that was fruitful ground for further improvements." It's an attitude that has continued with the series, as each iteration comes with a new designer at the helm.

For *Civ II* this meant a greater emphasis on trade and diplomacy to improve the long-term gameplay and to ensure the game wasn't solely about conquering every nation. Spies were added for the first time in the series for secret missions behind enemy lines. There was even novel use of the new CD player with the high council feature, a team of five advisors for each of the five core tenets of empire management that could be consulted via live-action videos to understand how well you're performing. While it was an educational tool primarily, helping to pinpoint your strengths and weaknesses versus other active civilizations, it added some comedic appeal in there too. The military advisor, for example, played the role of the typical, war-hungry general while the entertainment advisor whose sunglasses and Elvis-inspired idiolect always added a dash of fun to finding out your population was severely unhappy.

> "I HAVE THIS WEIRD FEELING THAT CIV II GAVE EVERYBODY THE CONFIDENCE THAT CIV COULD BE IMPROVED ON"
> DOUG KAUFMAN

But for as many new additions and refinements of the core concept that came with *Civ II*, the truth of the matter is that it was developed with certain limitations from a business standpoint.

MAP MAKING
ALPHA
MASONRY
Neutral Viking Emissary
"I speak for he who makes mortals tremble: Warlord Canute of the Vikings . . ."
OK

» [PC] Trade and negotiations were more important the second time around, but they were not effectively presented.

Times were tough for Microprose, which had been suffering from the broader company plans to dip its collective toes into new waters. Its arcade coin-op division had gobbled up a lot of the company's reserves, while the attempts to move into graphic adventures was mostly a case of too little, too late. Sid Meier himself had his attention focused elsewhere, so the sequel – as much of a shame as it may be to say – was more of a business-led decision than one of the famed strategy developer's passion around a sequel for *Civilization*. "I don't remember what our deadline was and I don't remember how fast we did it, but my impression is that it was pretty darn fast," admits Doug. And because of this strict timeframe, there was only so much that could be done. "If we had a longer deadline, if they had said 'We want a magnum opus, we'll give you two years to do this', it probably would've been a very different game because we would've been designing for a technology level, a player sophistication level that we would have to guess at and make it bleeding edge in our minds so that by the time it actually came out it would still be cutting edge at least. Whereas when you say you want something in a year, you make it as good as you can for what you have time for."

Despite that, Doug is insistent that *Civ II* "really had a lot of love poured into it regardless", just that it wasn't the latest, most exciting or innovative thing that could've happened to the franchise. "In every project, if you're good or if you're trained well, there comes that law of diminishing returns, where you can just kind of feel [that you should stop adding things]. It's like listening to the popcorn slow down and stop popping. You can still do stuff, you can *always* do stuff, and you can basically design *Civ III* after playtesting *Civ II* and say 'OK, what do I want to get rid of from this iteration?' But you've got a different game, a different enough game, that commercial requirements suggest to you that you could sell this, so don't keep going and make the next game, release this one and then consider the next one." Doug adds that while there may well have been things that he and Brian still wished they had done, the game was "ready when we needed it to be ready" and it came alongside plenty of genre defining mechanics.

Despite the rushed and restricted development cycle, *Civilization II* was not slighted in any manner as a result. It was released on PC in 1996, Mac in 1997 and PlayStation in 1999 and achieved a great deal of success. To this day it ranks as one the most loved of the series, and is the joint-highest rated *Civ* game on Metacritic. It's easy to look back after 25 years and see where the series has gone and the improvements that have come with it and think less of *Civ II*, but it was everything that the first *Civilization* sequel needed to be and more. "It is one of my prouder moments, in general terms of overall successfulness," says Doug. While he was happier with some reviews of *Dragonsphere*, that game sold "terribly". And while it might not have had the broad appeal of *Frontierville* on Facebook, which he worked on, it is regarded more highly. "I haven't played a lot of *Civ III* or *IV* or *V* or *VI*, but I see them and I see how they've evolved and the way the people have got into the micro-details and things, and I still feel like in some ways that *Civ II* was the start of the franchise," he suggests. "Like, *Civ I* was the foundation, right? But I have this weird feeling that *Civ II* gave everybody the confidence that *Civ* could be improved on, and that it was worth doing and you could alter things without destroying the original game."

KEEP IT CIVIL

YOUR GUIDE TO EACH CIVILIZATION

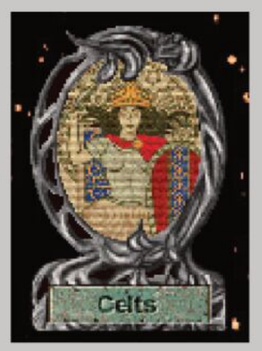
In *Civ II*, the starting technologies for each civilization are actually random, affected first by their definition as 'civilized', 'neutral' or 'militaristic' and then by the faction in general – and whether their real-world counterparts were famed for constructing a specific world wonder.

ROMANS

Male Leader: Julius Caesar
Female Leader: Livia Drusilla
Civ Colour: White
As expansionists, the Romans are better suited to the 'civilized' trait since it means they'll more likely receive the opportunity to build temples for happiness or courthouses to reduce corruption.

RUSSIANS

Male Leader: Lenin
Female Leader: Catherine The Great
Civ Colour: White
By choosing the Russians, you'll block the expansionist Romans and Celts from taking part – which is an advantage in itself – but you're also more likely to start with the horseman or phalanx units.



CELTS

Male Leader: Cunobelin
Female Leader: Boudica
Civ Colour: White
The Celts have a penchant for starting with ceremonial burial and therefore happiness from the temple improvement, though white-coloured civs are least likely to get multiple starting techs.

BABYLONIANS

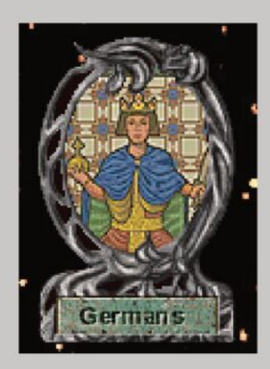
Male Leader: Hammurabi
Female Leader: Ishtari
Civ Colour: Green
If you're looking to get your hands on an early-game wonder, then pick the Babylonians who theoretically have a greater chance at unlocking pottery and with it the useful hanging gardens improvement.

ZULUS

Male Leader: Shaka
Female Leader: Shakala
Civ Colour: Green
If you're favouring an aggressive early start, then the Zulus are a pretty safe bet because they're more likely to start with one of the early military techs letting you win some scraps first.

JAPANESE

Male Leader: Tokugawa
Female Leader: Amaterasu
Civ Colour: Green
If you're lucky with the Japanese, this militaristic civ could well start with warrior code, horseback riding and/or bronze working, giving you very flexible army building options early on in your campaign.

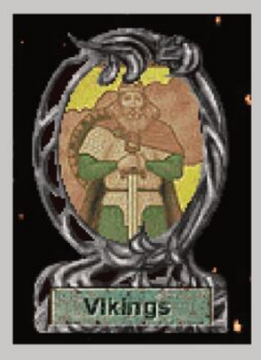


GERMANS

Male Leader: Frederick II
Female Leader: Maria Theresa
Civ Colour: Dark Blue
Versus the Romans (who are white and are therefore placed first), the Germans have a slight advantage since the game will need to calculate a decent spot of land away from the first two placed civs.

FRENCH

Male Leader: Louis XIV
Female Leader: Joan Of Arc
Civ Colour: Dark Blue
There isn't much to distinguish the advantages for the French and the Germans, and since only one civ of each colour can be active in any given game then it's really just a case of picking your poison.

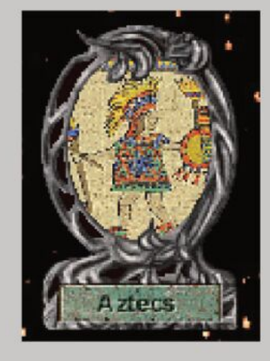


VIKINGS

Male Leader: Canute
Female Leader: Gunnhild
Civ Colour: Dark Blue
The Vikings are classed on a code level as 'neutral' when it comes to their love of war, which means they're one of a few civs with a chance at the rarest starting technologies such as construction or monarchy.

EGYPTIANS

Male Leader: Ramesses II
Female Leader: Cleopatra
Civ Colour: Yellow
You could argue that the Egyptians are the best civ available in the game due to their predisposition to start with the masonry tech, and therefore immediate access to building the pyramids – one of the best early-game wonders.

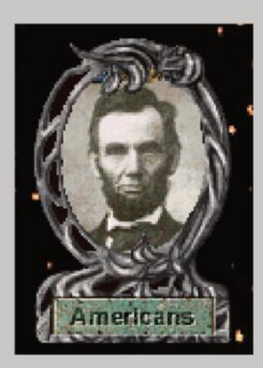


AZTECS

Male Leader: Montezuma
Female Leader: Nazca
Civ Colour: Yellow
'Jack-of-all-trades' don't really cut it in *Civ II*, and the yellow-coloured civs generally don't have too many advantages since the map is running out of space when they're placed and aren't likely to have multiple starting tech.

SPANISH

Male Leader: Phillip II
Female Leader: Isabella
Civ Colour: Yellow
The militaristic Spanish might be the best choice from the yellow-coloured civs since you could push aggressively at the start and take some nice neighbouring cities before anyone else gets their hands on them.



AMERICANS

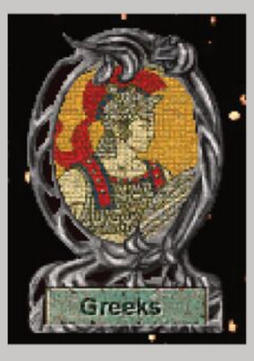
Male Leader: Abe Lincoln
Female Leader: Eleanor Roosevelt
Civ Colour: Teal
Since space is becoming limited at this point, the 'civilized' Americans have an opportunity to push straight to monarchy – and a slightly higher chance for multiple starting tech could help with that.

CHINESE

Male Leader: Mao Tse Tung
Female Leader: Wu Zhao
Civ Colour: Teal
Teal-coloured civs kinda offer the best potential chance for an early head start with a slightly higher chance at multiple starting tech. They could be placed close to other civs, though, and aren't militaristic enough for an early war.

PERSIANS

Male Leader: Xerxes
Female Leader: Scheherezade
Civ Colour: Teal
Persia might be your best teal-coloured civ of choice. Since they have a neutral classification, they have access to a wide range of potential outcomes for starting tech to fit their risky starting placement.



GREEKS

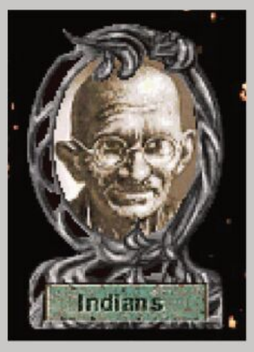
Male Leader: Alexander The Great
Female Leader: Hippolyta
Civ Colour: Orange
Due to the historic colossus world wonder, the Greeks are the most likely to begin the game with bronze working and therefore access to the phalanx unit. It's a good thing to consider if it's something you'd want to rely on.

ENGLISH

Male Leader: Henry VIII
Female Leader: Elizabeth I
Civ Colour: Orange
Orange-coloured civs have a higher chance at starting with multiple starting techs, which makes England's 'neutral' classification quite valuable thanks to the variety of potential techs to be unlocked.

CARTHAGINANS

Male Leader: Hannibal
Female Leader: Dido
Civ Colour: Orange
Like the Greeks, Carthage are militaristic and therefore more likely to start with military tech. The potential likelihood for bonus starting tech makes them a strong choice if you want a powerful army early on.



INDIANS

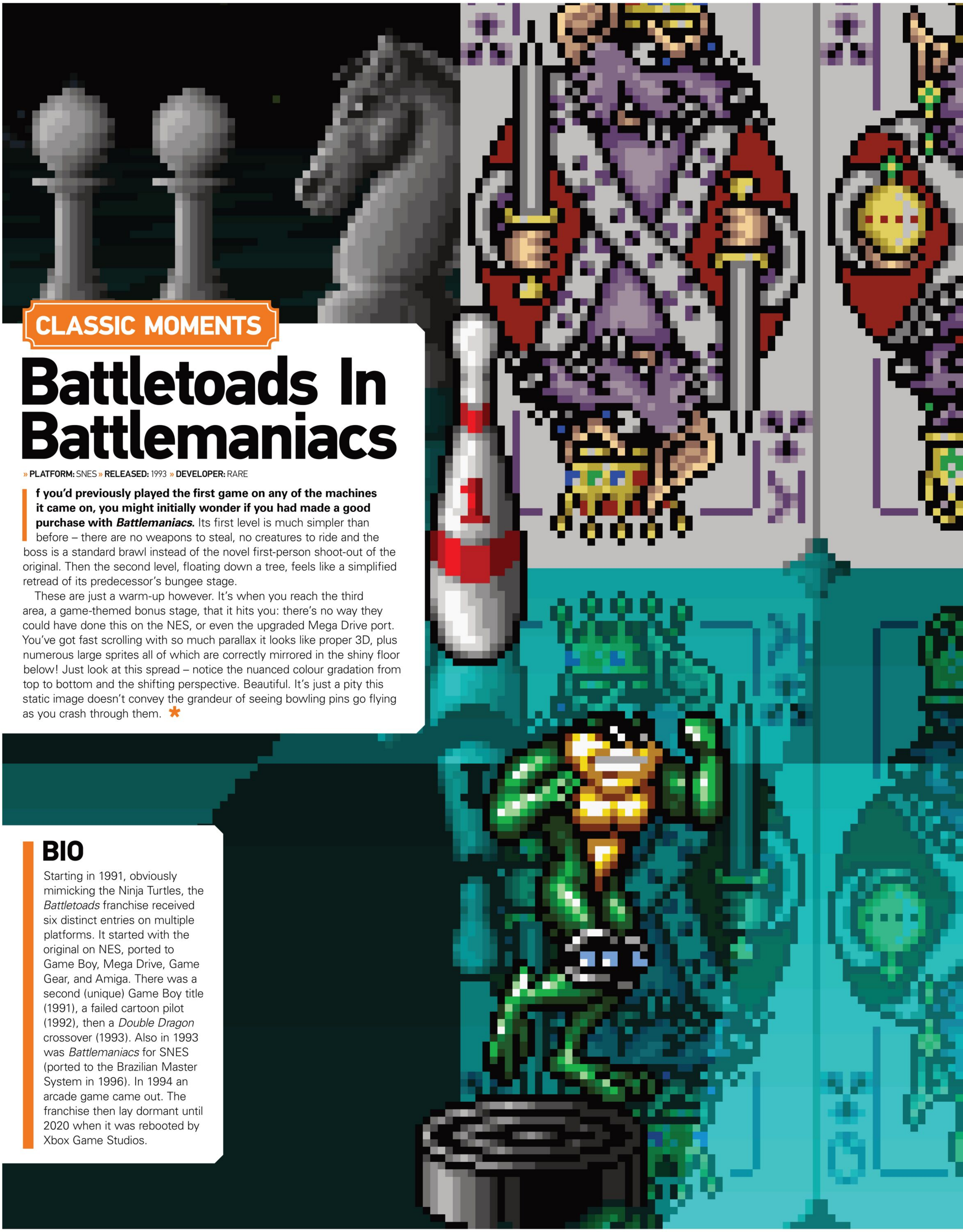
Male Leader: Mohandas Gandhi
Female Leader: Indira Gandhi
Civ Colour: Purple
The big risk for any purple-coloured civ is the fact that they might end up without any space, relegated to the map's ice caps. On the flip side, they are the most likely to receive multiple starting techs.

MONGOLS

Male Leader: Ghengis Khan
Female Leader: Bortei
Civ Colour: Purple
As the only purple militaristic civ, you could use that chance for multiple starting tech to give yourself a huge army advantage at the start that could make it difficult for others to counteract.

SIOUX

Male Leader: Sitting Bull
Female Leader: Sacajawea
Civ Colour: Purple
The Indians and the Sioux have the same classification, which means the same risks of a terrible starting location but a high chance to have some powerful tech to start the game with.



CLASSIC MOMENTS

Battletoads In Battlemaniacs

» **PLATFORM:** SNES » **RELEASED:** 1993 » **DEVELOPER:** RARE

If you'd previously played the first game on any of the machines it came on, you might initially wonder if you had made a good purchase with *Battlemaniacs*. Its first level is much simpler than before – there are no weapons to steal, no creatures to ride and the boss is a standard brawl instead of the novel first-person shoot-out of the original. Then the second level, floating down a tree, feels like a simplified retread of its predecessor's bungee stage.

These are just a warm-up however. It's when you reach the third area, a game-themed bonus stage, that it hits you: there's no way they could have done this on the NES, or even the upgraded Mega Drive port. You've got fast scrolling with so much parallax it looks like proper 3D, plus numerous large sprites all of which are correctly mirrored in the shiny floor below! Just look at this spread – notice the nuanced colour gradation from top to bottom and the shifting perspective. Beautiful. It's just a pity this static image doesn't convey the grandeur of seeing bowling pins go flying as you crash through them. *

BIO

Starting in 1991, obviously mimicking the Ninja Turtles, the *Battletoads* franchise received six distinct entries on multiple platforms. It started with the original on NES, ported to Game Boy, Mega Drive, Game Gear, and Amiga. There was a second (unique) Game Boy title (1991), a failed cartoon pilot (1992), then a *Double Dragon* crossover (1993). Also in 1993 was *Battlemaniacs* for SNES (ported to the Brazilian Master System in 1996). In 1994 an arcade game came out. The franchise then lay dormant until 2020 when it was rebooted by Xbox Game Studios.

MORE CLASSIC BATTLETOADS IN BATTLEMANIACS MOMENTS

Brotherly Love

Did you have a brother and did your parents make you take turns on the SNES? Naturally you'd convince him to use his turn on the two-player mode with you. Of course you'd select Mode A, so you could then attack him. Then you would sing, as loud as possible, *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother* by The Hollies while beating him senseless. When he started to cry and threatened to tell mum, you'd remind him he's probably adopted.

PTSD Flashbacks

For any veterans of the NES game the (slightly) easier pace of *Battlemaniacs* will feel like a welcome improvement.

Until you reach the speeder bike stage and… zqpphtzzgjnntzz!! Sorry, sorry, momentary brain spasm brought on by torturous flashbacks of this same stage on NES. It is obscenely fast and difficult, and there is no way any human can react to the obstacles. You just have to find your happy place inside and, like last time, memorise everything. Good luck.

Game Genie help

This is it, the last boss – the latex-clad Dark Queen. There is no shame in having used a Game Genie or button codes to get here. We've all done it. In fact it's dubious when anyone claims to finish a *Battletoads* game without some support. Anyway, be prepared for a right pegging since she depletes your entire health bar in just a few hits. Also don't be surprised if your player-two buddy has quit by now. Ours did.

Not The End

After stoically pushing on through six of the toughest levels in any game we've covered, you sit back – knuckles white, brow slick with sweat – believing you've won, and can put the controller down to enjoy the ending. But *Battlemaniacs* has one last trick: the ending suddenly turns into a shooting gallery! Grab the pad and fire your missiles to hit Silas Volkmire three times. Take too long and… well, you can always play the whole game again.

THE MAKING OF SPEED FREAKS

» [PlayStation] Collecting tokens fills up your boost meter, letting you shoot ahead of your opponents with the push of a button.

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
- **» DEVELOPER:** FUNCOM DUBLIN
- **» RELEASED:** 1999
- **» PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION
- **» GENRE:** RACING

» [PlayStation] *Speed Freaks* contains a variety of offensive items to trip up opponents with, like these rockets.

» Barry Lawless worked as a modeller on *Speed Freaks*.

» Lasse Louhento started at Funcom as a summer job.

» Phil Plunkett was a graphic artist on *Speed Freaks*.

FUNCOM DUBLIN WERE A TEAM OF YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED DEVELOPERS WITH HIGH AMBITIONS. WHAT ORIGINALLY STARTED LIFE AS A FUTURISTIC RACING GAME, BEFORE MORPHING INTO AN N64-STYLED MARIO KART HOMAGE HALFWAY THROUGH DEVELOPMENT, WOULD END UP AS SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT

WORDS BY NIALL O'DONOGHUE

» This character was dropped when Sony became involved – however, designs from older versions of the game can be seen on billboards in some tracks.

***Speed Freaks* is surprisingly bonkers.** Funcom's kart racer sees you flying around bright and colourful tracks, one minute using a marooned pirate ship as a shortcut, the next flying through the air while a rollercoaster soars overhead. Speed boosts and *Mario Kart*-inspired item power-ups can radically alter the dynamic of a race, but *Speed Freaks* is surprisingly hardcore, favouring those who put their nose to the grindstone and engage with mechanics like power sliding. The sheer spectacle of the game still impresses today, a feat that took two massive overhauls and years of work to get right.

Norwegian studio Funcom established its Dublin office in the mid-Nineties, at a time when games jobs in Ireland were few and far between. "We decided to set up an office in Dublin because of several factors, one of the most important being the art resources in the city," former product director at Funcom Jørgen Tharaldsen said in an interview with gamedevelopers.ie in 2004. "We saw the need to have a department within Funcom which could specialise in console games. While looking for interesting places we naturally explored every detail from recruitment to rent, wages, taxes and more. We chose Ireland in the end."

Lasse Louhento, former game lead on *Clash Of Clans* and CEO of development studio BIT ODD, moved out of his parents' home when he was just 16 years old and worked as lead artist on the MS-DOS adventure game *Alien Incident*. When he first heard that Funcom was hiring for its Dublin-based office, initially as a summer gig, he saw an opportunity and leapt at it. He had only ever travelled abroad to Sweden before and he recalls borrowing his mother's suitcase and putting a massive Mario sticker on the front, just in case he lost track of it at the airport. "It was like a real adventure," he says fondly.

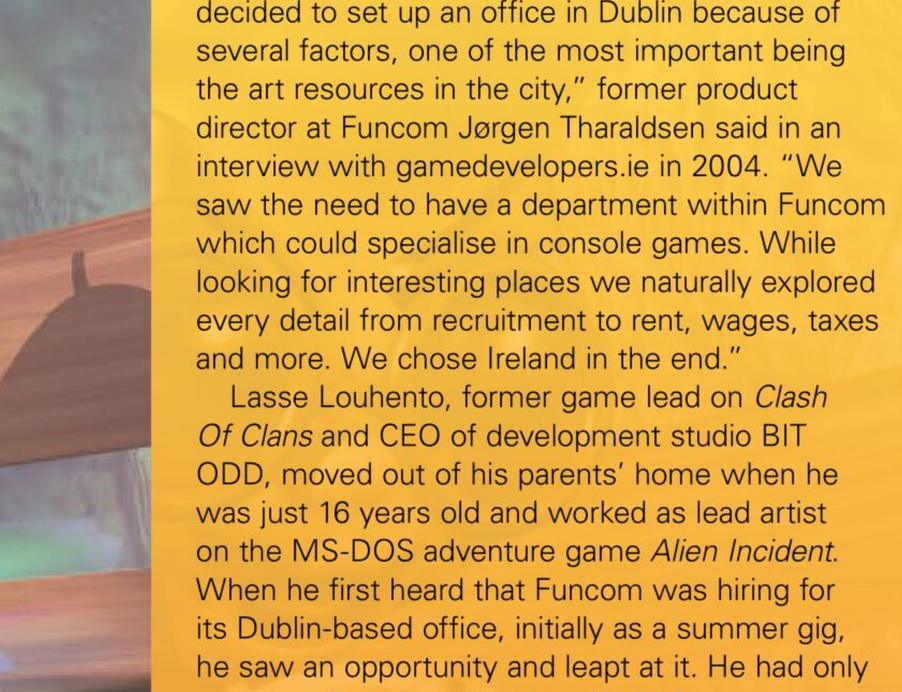
Phil Plunkett, lead artist at Giraffe Games and a graphic artist on *Speed Freaks*, previously worked at the Irish office of Gremlin Graphics, which was winding down when he heard about Funcom Dublin. After a successful interview and a trip to Funcom's Norwegian office, Phil and the team were sent to work on two different games: a cinematic platformer called *Split Realities* and a racing game with a distinctive carnival theme.

Initially, there was a top-down lack of experience at Funcom Dublin, from upper management to the developers themselves. "When you have so much inexperience and there's no rules and there's no set planning – I group myself in that, even though I had made two or three games – I look back from myself now and I see how inexperienced and naive we all were," Phil says. "Back in those days, games companies were poorly organised," Lasse agrees. "We had a secretary or assistant, and then we had a so-called CEO and maybe a finance person, but they were going on and off and there were just a bunch of kids gathering to do games."

This impacted the development of *Split Realities*, which ground to a halt. Phil then joined the team working on the nearly-completed *Impact Racing*, which was released in 1996. "After we did Impact Racing, we settled down as a company," Phil says. Funcom's management structure was also changing, which helped Funcom Dublin become a "steady group of developers" according to Phil.

Developers at Funcom Dublin were separated into two teams, one of which began work on *Speed Freaks*. The game was originally pitched as a follow-up to *Impact Racing*, with a Batmobile-style vehicle designed for a futuristic demo showcased to publisher Coconuts Japan Entertainment. Unfortunately, it didn't get the look and design of the game at all. "We left there, we were absolutely deflated," Phil remembers.

However, this inspired the developers to rework the game. Many were huge fans of Japanese games like *Mario Kart*, *Tetris Attack* and *F-Zero*,



» [PlayStation] Crowds cheer you on as you zip around stadium tracks, giving the races a real sense of atmosphere.

» [PlayStation] This intimidating ring of fire lets you pull off a dramatic stunt jump if you approach it from the right angle.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

IMPACT RACING
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, SATURN
YEAR: 1996

CHAMPIONSHIP MOTOCROSS FEATURING RICKY CARMICHAEL (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1999

CHAMPIONSHIP MOTOCROSS 2001 FEATURING RICKY CARMICHAEL
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 2001

COMPETITIVE RACERS

OTHER GAMES JOSTLING FOR POLE POSITION

TOY STORY RACER

Kart racers were a big thing in the late Nineties: even *Toy Story* got in on the action. Playing as Woody and his diminutive gang gave developer Traveller's Tales the opportunity to build creative tracks, where everyday settings like shopping centres and bowling alleys are turned into massive obstacle courses.

CRASH TEAM RACING

Naughty Dog released this classic kart racer around the same time as *Speed Freaks*. You can race as the iconic bandicoot himself or over a dozen different characters from the series, like Coco Bandicoot or Dingodile, and the game features a heap of references to its platforming origins, like wooden crates and wumpa fruit.

DRIVER

PlayStation fans also had a wealth of more serious racing games to consider alongside kart racers. Take *Driver*, for example – rather than the linear rollercoaster rides offered by titles like *Speed Freaks*, this game gave players the chance to explore an open world as an undercover NYPD officer.

NICKTOONS RACING

Software Creations' kart racer may be particularly nostalgic for some, as it includes characters from a variety of classic cartoons like *Rugrats*, *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Hey Arnold!*. The tracks are even themed around the cartoons – if you ever wanted to explore Bikini Bottom as Tommy from *Rugrats*, then look no further.

GRAN TURISMO

Whilst kart racers are fun to play as an arcadey experience, some players opted for more hardcore driving simulations like this popular racer. *Gran Turismo* released to massive critical acclaim, spawning a long-running series of racing games, and even lets players drive a variety of real-life cars, like Chevrolets and Hondas.

and they decided to make a more Japanese-influenced title. Sony was shown the game during development, saw its potential and bought Coconuts' contract. However, this came with a large tone shift that changed the course of development yet again. "Sony looked at the game and they said 'We love it, but we don't want to make a Nintendo game, we want to make a PlayStation game.' We were like 'What the hell?' It could've been finished in [the Nintendo] style – it was three-quarters of the way done as a game," Phil says. "It was sort of a shock to our system, but we were really passionate about what we did, we lived and breathed it, so we thought it was also pretty cool."

As a result, the team set about making more detailed and textured environments. The game's design was led by producer and developer Padraig Crowley and Phil estimates that the final version of *Speed Freaks* took about two years to develop. Fun, variety and 3D visuals were the main focus during development, according to senior lecturer in games art at Falmouth University Michael Boylan, animator on *Speed Freaks*. "The really, really important thing was nailing those drift mechanics and really, really tight level design," he says. "You needed to be skilful to play this game and play it well, but that said, [it was] easy to pick up – anyone could play it and not do very well at it but still maybe finish the game."

Michael had never worked in game development before joining Funcom. His background was in animation and he had recently graduated from a game design course at the Ballyfermot College Of Further Education. "Most of it now, I think I would've done a lot better… I'd only turned a PC on [for the first time] nine months before that," Michael says. "I felt like I could slot in and give

» [PlayStation] Every character celebrates a victory differently, like Tempest busting out a solo using an air guitar.

» [PlayStation] Revving your engine at the right moment gives you a boost at the start of a race, similar to *Super Mario Kart*.

value to the team pretty quickly, just start working and do stuff, and they liked it as well, they were happy to have me as part of their team."

Multiple interviewees praised the efforts of programmers like Ivar Olsen who helped to give the game a strong mechanical focus. However, it was also important that the game was fundamentally enjoyable to pick up and play. "We'd no interest in doing anything with futuristic stylings: grainy, dark. We wanted a bright, brash colourful thing that everybody could enjoy," Phil says.

Brainstorming sessions for tracks were organised by Padraig, but often whoever was modelling a track would be designing it as they went along. Theme parks like Disneyland were a source of inspiration for 3D artist Barry Lawless, a modeller on *Speed Freaks*, when designing tracks like Skate Park, which features a massive pirate skull embedded into a mountain. "The idea was just to make something memorable that you could actually remember next time you play that track: you can go 'OK, this is the one with the pirate ship in it', or 'This is the one with the skull head', you remember it from that rather than the actual layout of the track," Barry reveals.

Huge amounts of iteration went into every aspect of the game. For example, Lasse remembers creating around 500 versions of one orange ground texture. "We would tweak and tweak and tweak to get the colours right, it was just crazy," he says. "And no colour calibration either, because people were using tellies to play this thing. On one telly, it's like 'Oh this is perfect now, don't touch it!' Then I could see a programmer playing it on his [telly] and I'd go 'Oh my God'. It was just chaotic, but we were a really tight group."

MEET THE SPEED FREAKS

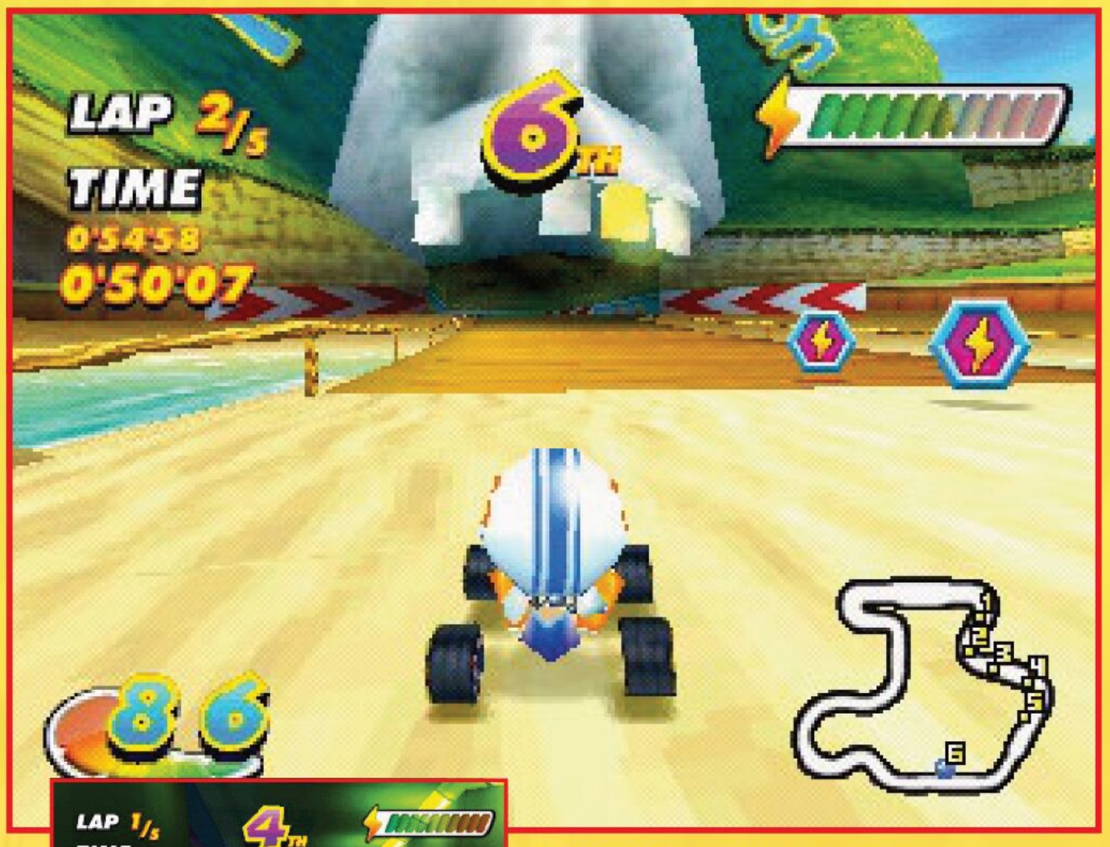
TEMPEST

Tempest is a spiky-haired kid with a love for rock music and heaps of enthusiasm. He drives a fast and heavy kart and can really dominate a race once he gets out in front, but getting hit by an item can be devastating as his acceleration is extremely poor.

BRAINS

We first meet this evil genius testing out a new and volatile kart using his poor grandmother as a test subject – it doesn't end well. He's also responsible for creating the unlockable robot BEEMER. His kart is light and relatively slow, but is highly agile.

» [PlayStation] Quaffing a purple potion turns your character translucent and makes you briefly invulnerable.



» [PlayStation] Certain levels have a futuristic setting, like Gold City.

» [PlayStation] Tracks often have a theme park feel to them, such as Skate Park's giant skull.

Sony also threw out existing character designs, coming up with the anti-heros that are in the final game. Many on the team loathed these characters, and still do to this day, but acknowledged that *Speed Freaks* needed Sony's help with development and marketing. "We were too inexperienced, back in that time, to create our own strong IP, I think. We could do backgrounds, we could do levels, but they're not the characters. We were lacking a better vision for the characters," Lasse says.

Composer Martin Schjøler initially wrote J-pop influenced tunes in the vein of *Mario Kart* for *Speed Freaks*, which you can still hear in some levels. However, Sony wanted the soundtrack to sound more "contemporary" and "cool", so Martin shifted focus to dance, techno and drum 'n' bass, whilst "trying to retain some playfulness". "It did give us a more defined vision and helped define the music more," Martin told us. "[Composer] Andrew Barnabas' input and direction was super helpful … he was also the one who got the cool Jamiroquai track for the intro video."

Speed Freaks was released in September 1999 in Europe, the same month that Naughty Dog's *Crash Team Racing* came out in North America, and some on the team claim that this was the reason that *Speed Freaks*' American release was delayed until April 2000. Additionally, the game was rebranded to *Speed Punks* in America – neither of these decisions went down well at the Dublin office. "It was foul play, it was crap. We were the small guy and it was easy to trample over us," Lasse says.

Work continued on a sequel, *Speed Freaks 2*, and on *JMX Racing*, a speedboat racing game for the original Xbox. However, in 2001, the team got bad news: Funcom was shifting focus entirely onto the development of its MMORPG *Anarchy Online* and the Dublin office was shuttered. "It was not an easy decision to make, but seeing that we are performing very well again today, while also being back in the console production area, I guess you can say it was the right decision," Jørgen Tharaldsen said in the 2004 gamedevelopers.ie interview.

Many were taken on by British developer Eurocom after the closure. However, this was a much larger and more structured company than Funcom Dublin and the team found themselves scattered across bigger projects. "It was kind of sad. I think with an experienced guy at the helm, we could probably have done really good things at Funcom Dublin," Barry says. "I think we probably just lacked a little bit of urgent focus, getting games out quicker – tighter production maybe would have solved it – but then again, that might have changed the whole dynamic that was great in Funcom."

Over 20 years later, it's easy to find fault with *Speed Freaks*. Phil feels that the game lacks originality, whilst Lasse thinks that the game is too difficult – the result of not having any external QA – and that the controls are unwieldy. However, all interviewees look back at the finished game fondly, an artefact of what they unanimously describe as a passionate and close-knit development team: a family.

They spent huge amounts of time at the office, either working on *Speed Freaks* or messing around in a multiplayer game, before heading down to local pubs afterwards. Phil, for example, remembers working twelve-hour days six or seven days a week for around a year, only to go home, keep working and fall asleep dreaming about the game.

Lasse, meanwhile, joined Funcom Dublin after having completed his mandatory military service in Norway and put on over 30 kilos in weight from all the overtime. Every interviewee insists this was driven by youth and enthusiasm, although Martin jokes that he "would die within one month" if he worked like that again now.

For Lasse, *Speed Freaks* holds a particular significance. He was diagnosed with a glioma, a brain tumour, in 2014. He describes it as a "ticking clock". Retro gaming is extremely important to him and Funcom Dublin represents what he views as the end of a golden era for console development. "That was the last console era where it was a small team, where we all chipped in to do all kinds of stuff. I did UI, I did the menu screens, I also recorded all the ghost cars – that was the last day of development," Lasse says. "It was crazy, sort-of amateur times." Or, as he also puts it, "We had something great going on." ✱

HERE'S A SELECTION OF THE RACERS YOU CAN COMPETE AGAINST

MONICA

This purple-haired racer, who we meet breaking out of the School For Young ladies, is one of the game's all-rounders. Her kart is well-balanced and equipped to handle just about anything that the game throws at her, making her a consistently solid option to pick.

MONTY

This character is a cheerful optimist, speeding around racetracks in his distinctive helmet: white with a blue visor. His kart is decked out similarly to Monica's, a jack-of-all-trades that can easily claim victory in the hands of a skilled player.

COSWORTH

This loveable dog can be seen in the character selection screen next to Monty. However, he's also one of the game's unlockable characters, obtained by placing first in every Easy League race and then beating him in a head-to-head race.

RECORD
1'05"560
TOTAL
4' 10"765
1ST
2ND
3RD
4TH
5TH
6TH

Ridge Racer Revolution

THE DAZZLING SEASON WILL COME AGAIN

» PlayStation » 1995 » Namco

Right now, I'm in a situation that I'm sure plenty of you out there have experienced at some time or another, where I find myself constantly fatigued and just thinking, "Man, I need a break." Whenever I take a moment to picture that break in my mind, to consider the very ideal of personal relaxation, I keep finding myself drawn not to any real place or time. Instead, I find myself thinking specifically about *Ridge Racer Revolution*. It's a weird choice for relaxation in some ways, as it's a very exciting game thanks to those wild drifts and a soundtrack that goes *hard*, and there are plenty of other *Ridge Racer* games on the system that I could be playing on the PlayStation and elsewhere.

Where *Ridge Racer Revolution* wins out for me is that it provides me with an idealised image of blue skies, golden beaches lined with palm trees, and the glistening sea. What's more, it does so with the mid-Nineties arcade aesthetic of the original, that bold, colourful look that also made for great beach stages in games like *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Tekken*. I can certainly appreciate the more subdued looks of *Rage Racer* and *Ridge Racer Type 4*, but they're not what I want when I think of getting away from it all.

The ridiculous thing about this is that it's the idea of the beach that I'm drawn to, rather than the actual reality of it. I don't actually like visiting the beach. Having had the misfortune to be born ginger, my tolerance for the sun is virtually zero, and I find the summer heat to be extremely unpleasant. For six and a half years I lived in central Bournemouth, just a ten-minute walk away from one of Britain's most popular beaches, yet it was a rare occasion for me to ever actually take advantage of that fact. *Ridge Racer Revolution* can deliver on my romanticised image of the beach without me ever having to deal with the inconveniences of actually stepping out onto the sand, and that's something that I'm genuinely thankful for. ✱

FROM THE ARCHIVES

MONOLITH

Since its acquisition by Warner Bros in 2004, Monolith Productions has been a powerhouse of modern gaming, creating classics like FEAR and the excellent Shadow Of War. But its story in the decade prior to that is one of chaotic creativity, leading to a golden era of eclectic games and technological trailblazing

WORDS BY ROBERT ZAK

» [PC] *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* was Monolith's first game in the LithTech engine, and was inspired by manga before manga was cool.

When you try to imagine how the developers behind *Blood*, one of the most gloriously gory games of the Nineties, first came together, the last thing that springs to mind is a games studio known for titles like *Millie's Math House*. Perhaps the placid nature of educational games development caused a pressure-cooker of wild ambition among a few of its developers, because it was at Edmark that the seven founders of Monolith began planning their break into the games industry.

It all stemmed from a love of gaming. One of the founders, Toby Gladwell, recalls those early experiences. "We'd been playing *Doom*, we came together with a love of games and wanted to take a stab at building them," he tells us. "Maybe it's the arrogance of being in our early twenties, but at the time we thought we were the most creative group of our time."

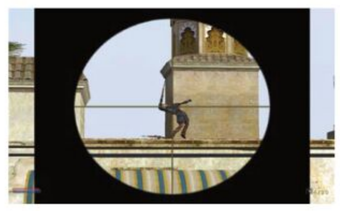
Naturally, several of the founders wanted to jump straight into game development, but Jason (Jace) Hall – a charismatic big-thinker who would procure many of Monolith's most lucrative deals – had another idea: a MegaMedia CD.

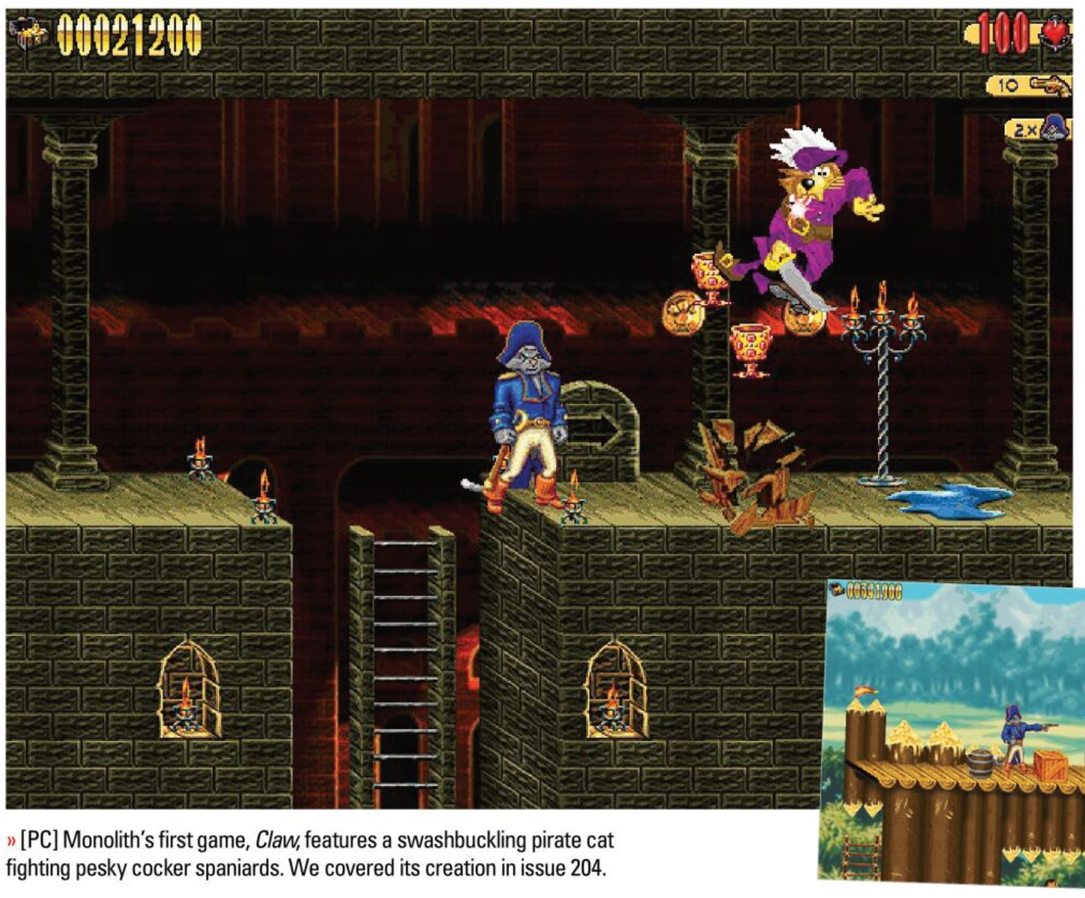
The idea was quintessentially Nineties. An innovation called Redbook Audio meant that videos, game demos and music could all be stored on the same CD. Jace created some videos and music, and Brian Goble contributed a special version of his game *Microman*, among other things. In 1994 Jace left Edmark to become Monolith's evangelist, using the Monolith CD as a gospel to attract the people that mattered.

It didn't take long. Jace impressed Microsoft, which just so happened to be working on the first iteration of DirectX – an API that would unlock the dormant power of PCs for gaming.

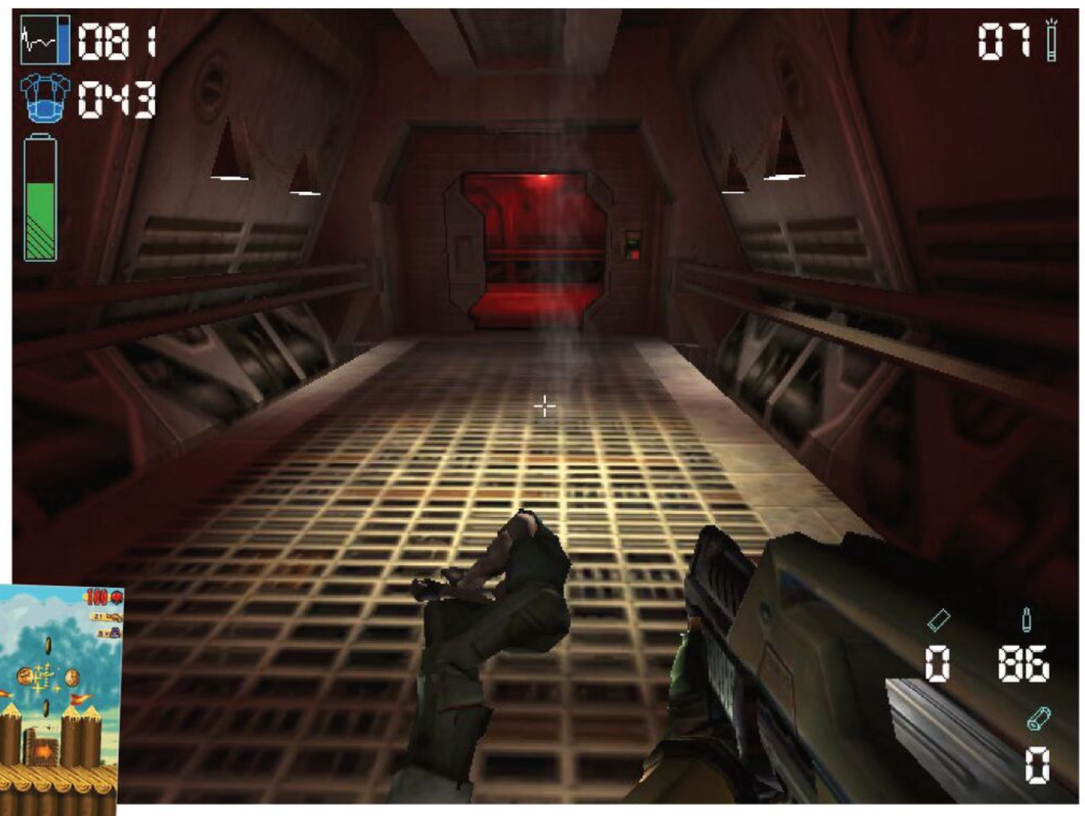
Soon after that, the cofounders of Monolith left Edmark and piled into the prestigious compound of Microsoft for some contract work on Windows 95 gaming CDs. Monolith cofounder Garrett Price remembers this pivotal moment. "Windows gaming didn't exist then, it was all DOS," he tells us. "We left Edmark sort of on a prayer – it was way scarier for Brian [Bouwman] who had a child at the time, but the rest of us were like 'We're young, let's do this!'" The Monolith team's arrival at Microsoft coincided with another seismic

» [PC] Cate Archer, the sassy protagonist of *No One Lives Forever*, would become a cult hero of PC gaming.





» [PC] Monolith's first game, *Claw*, features a swashbuckling pirate cat fighting pesky cocker spaniards. We covered its creation in issue 204.



» [PC] In the dark corners of the internet, you can still find online games of *Aliens Versus Predator 2*'s survivor mode being played.

moment in software history. "We'd been there a week when Windows 95 shipped. It went gold, and I remember it clearly because I was standing outside, and about two or three thousand people came running out of the buildings from across the way," says Toby. "It was like a stampede."

The Monolith team worked "out of a couple of closets" at Microsoft, making sample CDs while Jace continued to make contacts in the wider industry. They put all the money from their Microsoft work into the Monolith start-up pot. Jace's ever-growing network of contacts paid dividends too, when a Japanese company called Takarajimasha invested a sizeable amount of money into Monolith.

Later that year, the Monolith team moved out of their Microsoft quarters to their first office – though perhaps 'compound' is a more fitting description. "We leased a bunch of buildings in this office park," says Garrett. "I remember walking through it with my wife and she asked 'How are you ever gonna fill all these up?' We just began rounding up our friends from other companies. We almost instantly had this whole crew."

With the studio complex set up in 1996 – complete with sound studio and other high-end extras – it was time for Monolith to make its first homegrown game. Garrett was Monolith's original artist, and presented the rest of the team with a shelved project from his art school days. It was Captain Claw – an anthropomorphic pirate cat who fought through packs of 'cocker spaniard' dogs in his pursuit of the Amulet Of The Nine Tails.

"I was obsessed with New Wave music, Adam And The Ants, all that stuff, so that whole romantic pirate outfits thing. This was right before *Earthworm Jim* came out too, so a good time for irreverent weird characters," Garrett tells us, proud of his pet project that would kickstart Monolith's resume.

> "I WAS OBSESSED WITH NEW WAVE MUSIC, ADAM AND THE ANTS, ALL THAT STUFF, SO THAT WHOLE ROMANTIC PIRATE OUTFITS THING. THIS WAS RIGHT BEFORE EARTHWORM JIM CAME OUT TOO, SO A GOOD TIME FOR IRREVERENT WEIRD CHARACTERS"
>
> **GARRETT PRICE**

Right from the start, Monolith was a many-tendrilled beast, always finding itself on the technological boundaries of the medium. While working on *Claw*, Monolith acquired Q Studios, which was working on the last – and arguably greatest – of the Build engine shooters, *Blood*.

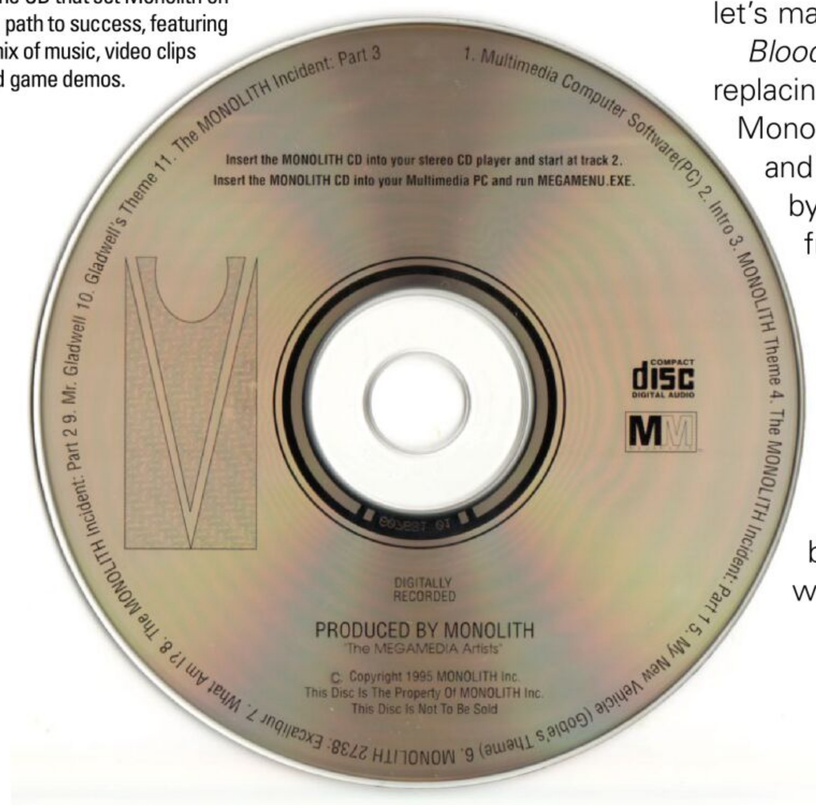
"Q Studios was launched by our friend Nick Neilhard," Garrett recalls. "In this whole pedal-to-the-metal thing, Jason was like 'Let's just acquire Q Studios, let's get Nick in, let's give him stock, let's make him a part of this too.'"

Blood was a much-loved game, eventually replacing *Doom* as the go-to deathmatch game at Monolith. It had comical *Evil Dead*-type dialogue and detailed sprites based on models sculpted by Kevin Kilstrom. "He got a sculpting degree from Wazoo and could make these amazing movie masks," says Garrett. "Literally cinema quality stuff. He sculpted all these characters and maquettes for *Blood*."

Beloved though *Blood* was, it represented the end of an era in PC gaming, as 2.5D graphics made way for 3D-accelerated ones. Monolith knew it had to be part of this revolution, and even as *Blood* was still in development there was already a ▶

» A team photo of the Monolith team circa 1997, during the development of *Blood*.

» The CD that set Monolith on the path to success, featuring a mix of music, video clips and game demos.


1. Multimedia Computer Software(PC) 2. Intro 3. MONOLITH Theme 4. The MONOLITH Incident: Part 1 5. My New Vehicle (Goobie's Theme) 6. MONOLITH 2738: Excalibur 7. What Am I? 8. The MONOLITH Incident: Part 2 9. Mr. Gladwell 10. Gladwell's Theme 11. The MONOLITH Incident: Part 3
Insert the MONOLITH CD into your stereo CD player and start at track 2.
Insert the MONOLITH CD into your Multimedia PC and run MEGAMENU.EXE.
COMPACT disc DIGITAL AUDIO
DIGITALLY RECORDED
PRODUCED BY MONOLITH
"The MEGAMEDIA Artists"
© Copyright 1995 MONOLITH Inc.
This Disc Is The Property Of MONOLITH Inc.
This Disc Is Not To Be Sold

TIMELINE

1994

■ The founders of Monolith, all working at children's software company Edmark, decide to create a game studio. They create a 'MegaMedia CD' showcasing the studio's talents to showreel to companies.

1995

■ The CD, combined with Jace Hall's pitch, impresses Microsoft. The Monolith team leaves Edmark to work on sample CDs and demo disks for Microsoft. The money from this and a Japanese investment firm prompt Monolith to buy several office buildings in an office park in Kirkland.

1996

■ Monolith is sent the Verite V1000, one of the first 3D-accelerated graphics cards. This spurs the studio on to building its own 3D game engine, DirectEngine, which would eventually become LithTech.

1997

■ Monolith launches its first game, *Claw* – a 2D platformer based on one of Garrett Price's art-school projects. Monolith also acquires Q Studios, which was working on *Blood* at the time. *Blood* is released.

1998

■ Monolith releases its first two games in the 3D LithTech engine – *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* and *Blood II: The Chosen*. Both games prove challenging due to the novelty of 3D graphics, but *Shogo* becomes a critical success.

1999

■ Following years of growth and expansion, Monolith is forced to cut staff and let go of some of its publishing division and mo-cap studio Monolith Studios. Focus turns to game and engine development, setting the stage for some of Monolith's finest games.

» [PC] *Blood* was among the final 2.5D first-person shooters, but it would be a while before 3D shooters would look this good.

team dedicated to building an in-house 3D engine.

In 1996, Monolith received the Rendition Verite V1000, one of the first 3D-accelerated video cards. This heralded the birth of DirectEngine, which would morph into LithTech – the engine that Monolith continues to use to this day.

But the early going with 3D wasn't easy. This was unfamiliar technology, it was expensive and it would take a few years for Monolith to find its footing with it. The stark visual contrast between the handcrafted pixel art of the original *Blood* and the rudimentary 3D graphics of its less-loved 1998 sequel, captured this tension.

"Both *Blood 2* and *Shogo* were built with LithTech. We faced a ton of challenges going from 2D sprites that have lots of detail to 3D modelling which at the time was rough – triangle throughputs were very low, texture size was tiny," admits Toby. "There was a quality bar which was really difficult to hit."

> "WE COULD BUILD A SYSTEM THAT LETS ARTISTS DO THESE SPECIAL EFFECTS, AND IT BECAME THE BASIS FOR SANITY: AIKEN'S ARTIFACT. THAT EFFECTS SYSTEM ACTUALLY GOT USED IN PRETTY MUCH ALL OUR OTHER TITLES"
>
> **TOBY GLADWELL**

Monolith continued releasing games based on the tastes of the team rather than the trends of the market. *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* was a mech shooter inspired by the team's love of manga. "We had an exchange student and she had given us some *Gundam* magazines, *Dancouga* and other things that I'd draw inspiration from for *Shogo*," Garrett remembers. "The concept artists just blew that out and made it amazing."

Then there were more humble 2D efforts. *Get Medieval* was an irreverent dungeon crawler based on *Gauntlet*, which many of the devs played in arcades growing up, while *Gruntz* was a real-time strategy game inspired by the team's obsession with *Warcraft II*.

Monolith was prolific between 1998 and 1999, releasing nine games as a publisher and developer. The studio was self-publishing, it was publishing for others, it had a dedicated engine department, and even had a motion-capture services wing called Monolith Studios. The idealistic young company was beginning to overstretch itself.

"We had a lot of overheads at this time, so unfortunately we did have to take steps and shrink the company," Toby explains. "It was extremely difficult for us to go through, and maybe the first time we had to take a collective breath, sit down and talk about where we were going and focusing on the right things for the future. We grew too quickly, and we tried to do too much."

This is the point where Toby believes the company culture shifted. The focus around games tightened, which also meant that some of that chaotic creativity had to be reeled in towards a more managed, structured model. Monolith Studios and the publishing side ceased operations.

Both Toby and Garrett admit they're most fond of the earlier, more carefree days of Monolith, but the next few years would be some of the studio's finest. In 2000 it released its first game on the new LithTech 2.0 engine, *Sanity: Aiken's Artifact* – a top-down action game casting you as a psychic special agent voiced by rapper Ice-T.

While it wasn't Monolith's most famous game, it marked a breakthrough for the LithTech engine, propelled by the launch of Voodoo 2 graphics

» Kevin Kilstrom was the sculptor behind the beautifully disgusting sprites in the original *Blood*.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

GARRETT PRICE

Garrett left Monolith just before the Warner Bros acquisition and co-founded downloadable game studio Hipsoft with several Monolith alumni, including Brian Goble. After over a decade making dozens of download-only games like the *Build-A-Lot* and *Flip Words* series, he eventually became disillusioned with the industry's push towards increasingly coercive free-to-play models. He is now vice president at UX design company Sterling.

TOBY GLADWELL

Toby left Monolith for Secret Lair Studios, which eventually got purchased by Activision and rebranded as Sierra Online. He is currently working on a secret HMD-based project involving AR that will revolutionise a certain thing he "can't talk about", despite our best efforts to unearth more. The superlative 'trailblazing' was used however, so consider our curiosity piqued.

JASON HALL

The frontman and CEO of Monolith climbed the ranks after the Warner Bros acquisition to become senior vice president of Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment. He went on to make the viral *I Play W.O.W.* music video (look it up), got choked out by John Carmack on his YouTube channel and is now CEO of videogame records platform Twin Galaxies.

THE DNA OF MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS

START BIG

Few studios start as 'big' as Monolith, with its multi-building office complex, sound studios and rapid acquisition of talent. The studio built up its start-up pot so that it could afford to go in all guns blazing, and that helped it make all the moves it wanted to once it started working independently.

GAMER CAMARADERIE

Many people who left Monolith would later end up coming back. The studio had a strong camaraderie, fuelled by the fact that Monolith would make games based around its personal interests than the wider market. It was a paradise for passionate, talented developers.

chips. "*Final Fantasy VII* had recently come out, and I was blown away by the effects that it had," says Toby. "It made us realise we could just build a system that lets artists do these special effects, and it became the basis for *Sanity: Aiken's Artifact*. That effects system actually got used in pretty much all our other titles."

» [PC] Sanity: *Aiken's Artifact* was one of Monolith's less known but more important games.

S*anity* laid the groundwork for what would become two of Monolith's most beloved games: sassy Sixties-themed shooter *No One Lives Forever* and *Aliens Versus Predator 2* – arguably the best ever use of the *Alien* IP in videogames. These games marked the maturation of the studio and its engine technology they had been working on over the previous four years. The two games' contrasting tones of campy irreverence and cold sci-fi horror – witty originality and loyalty to a beloved IP – embodied the omnidirectional spirit that was such a key part of Monolith's identity.

The success of *Aliens Versus Predator 2* solidified Monolith's Warner Bros connection, which would lead to the (ill-fated) *Matrix Online* and ultimately to the much less ill-fated acquisition of Monolith in 2004.

Before the acquisition, there was still time for a much-improved *No One Lives Forever* sequel and *Tron 2.0*, which was again as much a passion project as a lucrative job. "*Tron* was cemented in our childhoods as the coolest thing ever, so we got this opportunity to build a game in the *Tron* universe and even meet Sid Mead – talk about fanboyness," Toby recalls. "We were able to leverage our knowledge building shooters to make a game that was really well-received."

Monolith would remain a forward-thinking developer under Warner Bros. *FEAR* (2005) pushed the envelope of AI and graphical prowess, while *Shadow Of Mordor*'s nemesis system was deemed to be such an asset to Warner Bros that it was recently patented. But that gets to the heart of why Monolith's acquisition was bittersweet.

While the legacy and talent crossed over into the new era, the nemesis patent is indicative of how great game design can get tainted by the cold dry calculations of publisher interests, which are often at odds with the interests of the gamer. That first decade of Monolith, on the other hand, was driven by gamers who just so happened to be an exceptional team of developers, and we were all winners from it. ✱

» [PC] *Get Medieval* was a *Gauntlet*-inspired dungeon crawler starring a charmingly Arnie-like barbarian.

» [PC] *No One Lives Forever 2* was a big improvement on the original, with functioning stealth and an RPG-lite skill system.

TIMELINE

2000

■ *No One Lives Forever* is released. The game is the first commercially successful showcase of the LithTech engine, and LithTech is spun off to become its own company dedicated to engine development.

2001

■ *Aliens Versus Predator 2* comes out. It's Monolith's first collaboration with Warner Bros, and the game's success is the start of a relationship that would lead to the studio's acquisition. Development begins on an MMORPG set in *The Matrix* universe, *The Matrix Online*.

2003

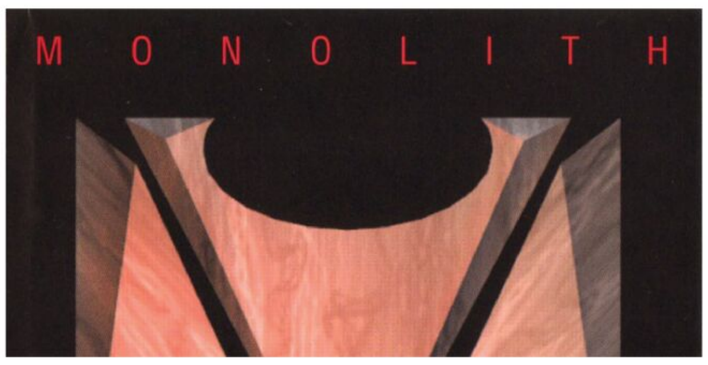
■ Monolith's work with major IPs continues as the studio releases *Tron 2.0*. The game is launched across multiple platforms, and joins Monolith's ever-growing catalogue of cult classics. Work begins on supernatural fly-kicking shooter *FEAR*.

2004

■ Monolith Productions is acquired by Warner Brothers, with most of the founders leaving to pursue new projects.

CREATIVE SCHIZOPHRENIA

■ Toby Gladwell described the early days of Monolith as a kind of "creative schizophrenia" – meant in the best possible way. The studio never went for the generic and never made games that suggested some kind of formulaic approach or rhythm. It was a studio of diverse, wild ideas and that's reflected in its eclectic output.



SOUND STRATEGY

■ Monolith was a studio of audiophiles as much as a studio of gamers. The in-house sound studio gave its games an unusual level of sound fidelity as well as great sound design – from the dialogue of *Blood*, through to the soundtrack of *No One Lives Forever* and the terrifying scurrying and radar plips of *Aliens Versus Predator 2*.

LITHTECH ENGINE

■ Monolith was never content with following the pack, so when 3D graphics came around, the studio jumped in at the deep end by getting to work on its own engine. This was tough at first, but eventually paid off, giving the studio more freedom with its game design later on.

THE MAKING OF

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

DISCOVER HOW A MAGAZINE ACCUSED OF HELPING HITMEN, A REAL-LIFE MERCENARY AND INNOVATIVE TECH HELPED CREATE AN FPS THAT WOULD BECOME EMBROILED IN CONTROVERSY

WORDS BY PAUL WALKER-EMIG

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

HEXEN II (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1998

STAR WARS JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST
SYSTEM: PC, GAMECUBE, XBOX, MAC
YEAR: 2002

QUAKE 4
SYSTEM: PC, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2005

The pitch for *Soldier Of Fortune* was bizarre. If you were told you were going to be making a game based on a licence, you might expect a superhero like Batman, or a well-known movie franchise like *Terminator*. Instead, Raven Software got a magazine. As if that wasn't unusual enough, *Soldier Of Fortune* was a magazine about the niche subject of mercenaries and war, little known in the mainstream save perhaps for brief eruptions of notoriety during the instances it was taken to court for contract killings that had been arranged through advertisements in its pages in the Eighties.

Dan Kramer, who worked on *Soldier Of Fortune* as assistant programming director, reveals that he and many of his colleagues were bemused when they found out they would be making a game based on a mercenary magazine. "If I recall, Raven were wrapping up *Heretic II* and were looking at what they were going to do next. One day, Brian Raffel [Raven cofounder] came in and told us that Activision had acquired the *Soldier Of Fortune* licence and that we were going to make a game. Quite honestly, I don't think any of us really knew what to do at first. If any of us had even heard of it, all we had heard was it was a magazine. A print magazine? We're like 'How does that even translate into games?' It was a surprise."

» [PC] Well, this isn't going to end well for you my friend.

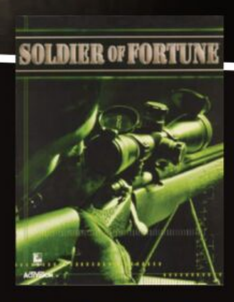
Nevertheless, the team was determined to make it work. "Licensed games had a bad reputation," Dan recalls. "You make a crappy game and then slap a licence on it and hope it sells, was how they were viewed. We were keenly aware of that, but Raven has a lot of pride in the work it does and so we were not about to just, I'll say 'shit in a box', because that was the expression we used at the time, and then send that out to the stores. We wanted to make something we were proud of."

Dan tells us that the team went through a couple of iterations in the early stages of development, swerving from a more traditional shooter approach to something inspired by the then recently released *Rainbow Six*, where players would have to plan a squad's entry to a building, before changing courses again. "What really solidified it, gave us some direction, was when we found out about John Mullins."

John Mullins is not only the name of the main character in *Soldier Of Fortune*, but a real person. A former Special Forces soldier who fought in the Vietnam war, before moving into mercenary work in the Eighties, John would became something of a face for *Soldier Of Fortune*.

"It was the *Soldier Of Fortune* magazine team who recommended John as a consultant," *Soldier Of Fortune* project coordinator Eric Biessman says on how Mullins became involved. "He came to Raven and spent a good deal of time with the team discussing his career, and sharing how people react in combat situations, how they trained, the best way to approach a situation – you name it. It was incredible to be able to sit down and just listen to him speak."

"Once we had that person to focus on, it kind of built a character that we could say 'OK we can make a game around that,'" says Dan.

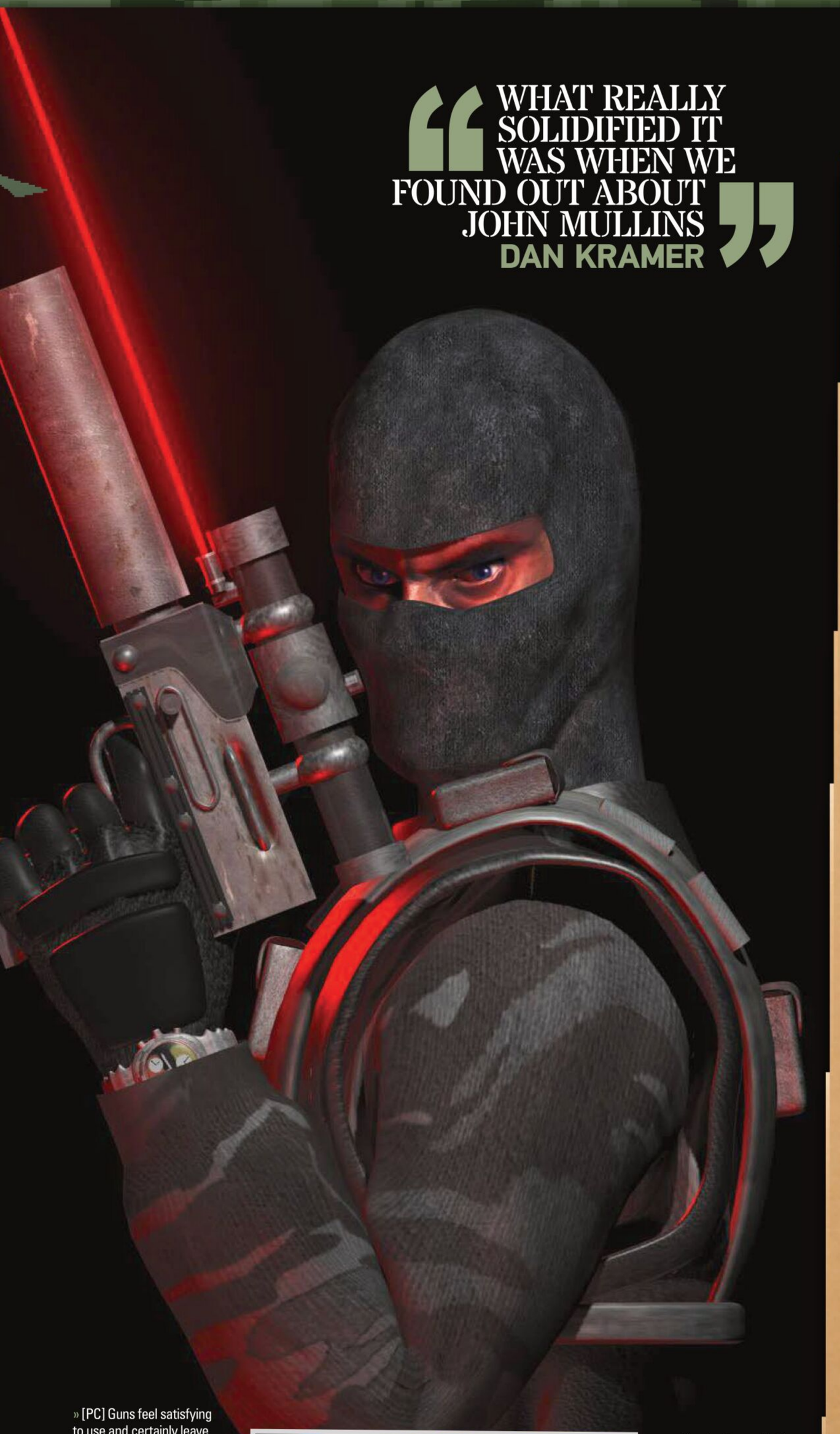


IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
» **DEVELOPER:** RAVEN SOFTWARE
» **RELEASED:** 2000
» **PLATFORM:** PC, PS2, DREAMCAST,
» **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

» [PC] John Mullins always seems to find a way to end his missions by doing a cool jump from an explosion.

> "WHAT REALLY SOLIDIFIED IT WAS WHEN WE FOUND OUT ABOUT JOHN MULLINS"
> **DAN KRAMER**



» [PC] Guns feel satisfying to use and certainly leave their mark on enemies.

» Now an engineering lead at PUBG Corporation, Dan Kramer worked on *Soldier Of Fortune* as assistant programming director.

» A project coordinator on *Soldier Of Fortune*, Eric Biessman is still at Raven Software all these years later, where he is now senior creative director.

FURTHER FORTUNES

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE'S GLOBE-TROTTING SEQUELS

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX

John Mullins reprised his role in a sequel to take down another set of terrorists, this time using biological warfare as their threat. The game was a relatively well-received iteration of the first entry, offering new weapons and equipment and an expanded gore system.

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE: PAYBACK

This was the first game in the series not developed by Raven Software, with publisher Activision handing the reigns to Prague-based developer Cauldron HQ instead. The game got the gore aspect right, but failed to recapture any of the other elements that made the previous games fun. It found itself poorly received by critics as a result.

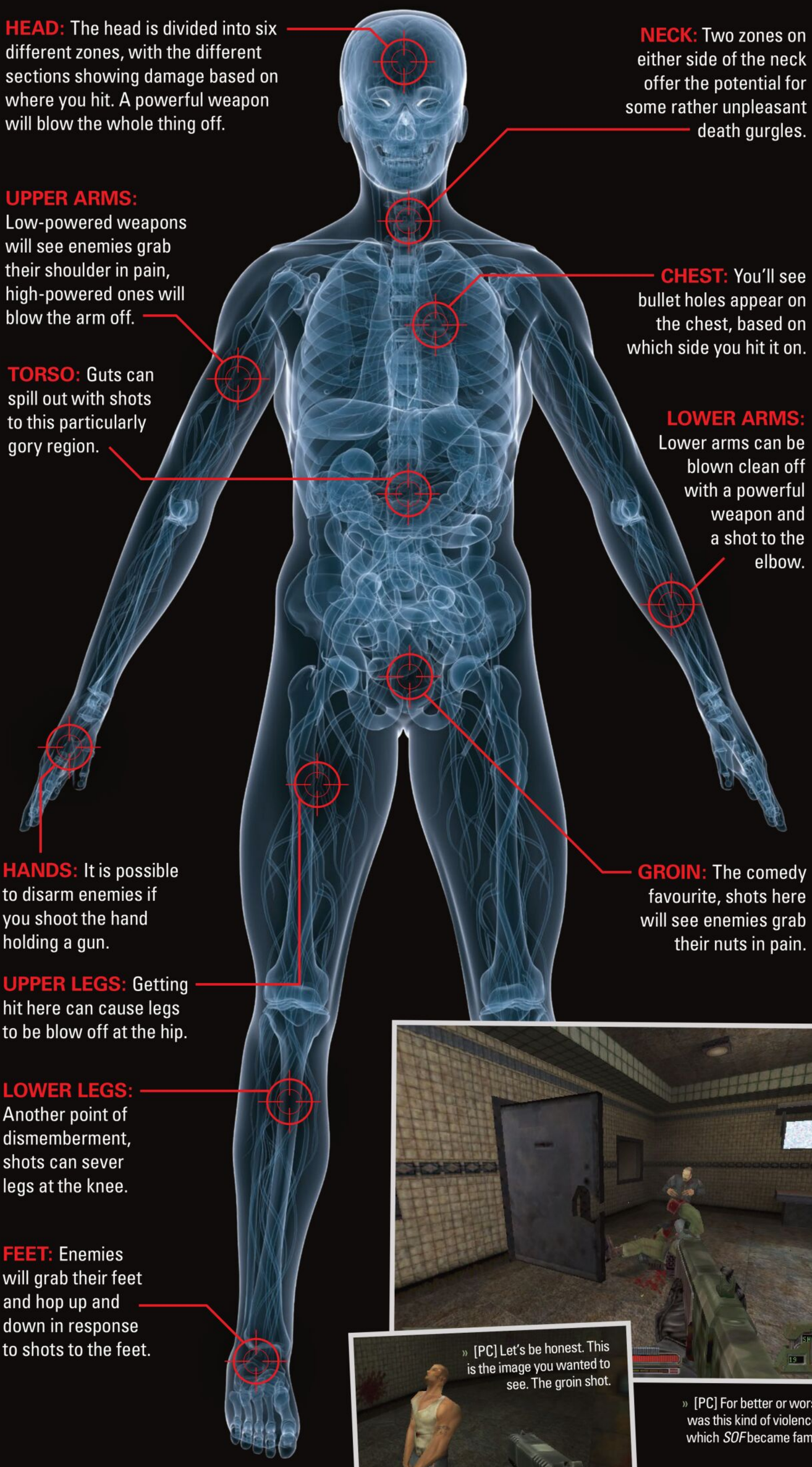
SOLDIER OF FORTUNE ONLINE

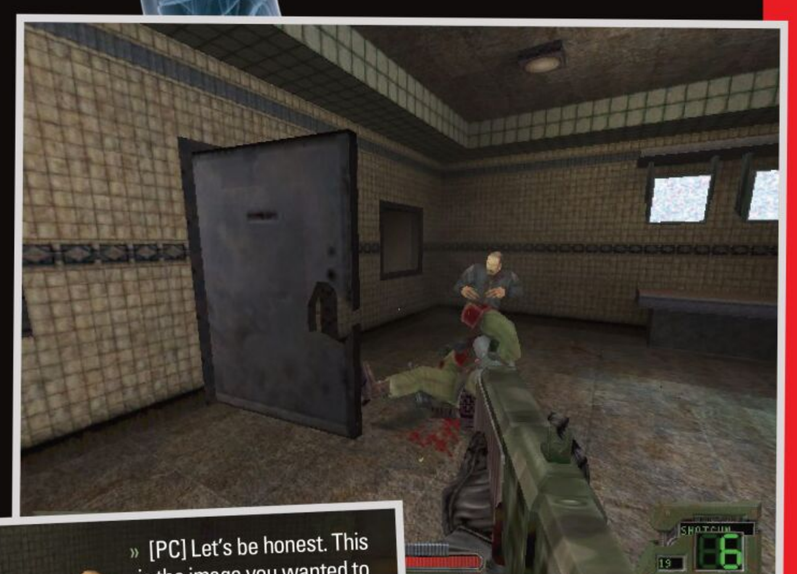
This ill-fated final iteration of the *Soldier Of Fortune* series was overseen by Dragonfly, who created an MMOFPS interpretation of the series. The game's closed beta was only released in Korea and was not successful, meaning there is little well-sourced information about the game available. However, it appears that a few days after the closed beta was released in 2010, it was closed and never saw the light of day again.

» [PC] Enemies take machine gun fire like they are in an Eighties action movie, juddering from side to side.

SHOOT TO KILL

THE POSSIBILITIES OFFERED BY THE GORY GHOUL ENGINE


HEAD: The head is divided into six different zones, with the different sections showing damage based on where you hit. A powerful weapon will blow the whole thing off.
NECK: Two zones on either side of the neck offer the potential for some rather unpleasant death gurgles.
UPPER ARMS: Low-powered weapons will see enemies grab their shoulder in pain, high-powered ones will blow the arm off.
CHEST: You'll see bullet holes appear on the chest, based on which side you hit it on.
TORSO: Guts can spill out with shots to this particularly gory region.
LOWER ARMS: Lower arms can be blown clean off with a powerful weapon and a shot to the elbow.
HANDS: It is possible to disarm enemies if you shoot the hand holding a gun.
GROIN: The comedy favourite, shots here will see enemies grab their nuts in pain.
UPPER LEGS: Getting hit here can cause legs to be blow off at the hip.
LOWER LEGS: Another point of dismemberment, shots can sever legs at the knee.
FEET: Enemies will grab their feet and hop up and down in response to shots to the feet.



» [PC] For better or worse, it was this kind of violence for which *SOF* became famous.

» [PC] Let's be honest. This is the image you wanted to see. The groin shot.

> "I PERSONALLY THOUGHT THE OUTRAGE WAS RIDICULOUS. IT WAS HYPOCRITICAL"
> **DAN KRAMER**

John and the credibility he lent to the game as a result of his real-life experience as a soldier was front and centre of the game's marketing, so it would be fair to question to what extent he actually had an impact on the game's development and to what extent that was all just marketing fluff.

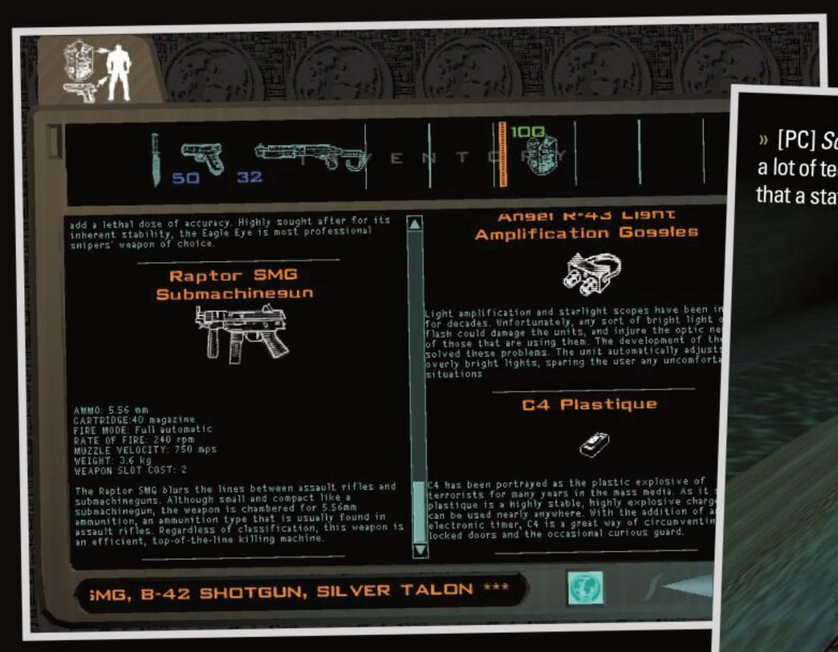
"He certainly was a marketing thing, but he did come out to the office a couple of times," Dan replies. "We were pushing so-called realism at the time, so there were conversations about how would this actually work in the real world. Whether we actually consulted him about where to place cover or anything like that, no. We might of asked him for ideas for weapons. I think he might have had something to do with that."

The other headline feature of *Soldier Of Fortune* was the technology that could read which part of an enemy's body you were hitting and have them react accordingly, an innovation that is attributed to Gil Gribb.

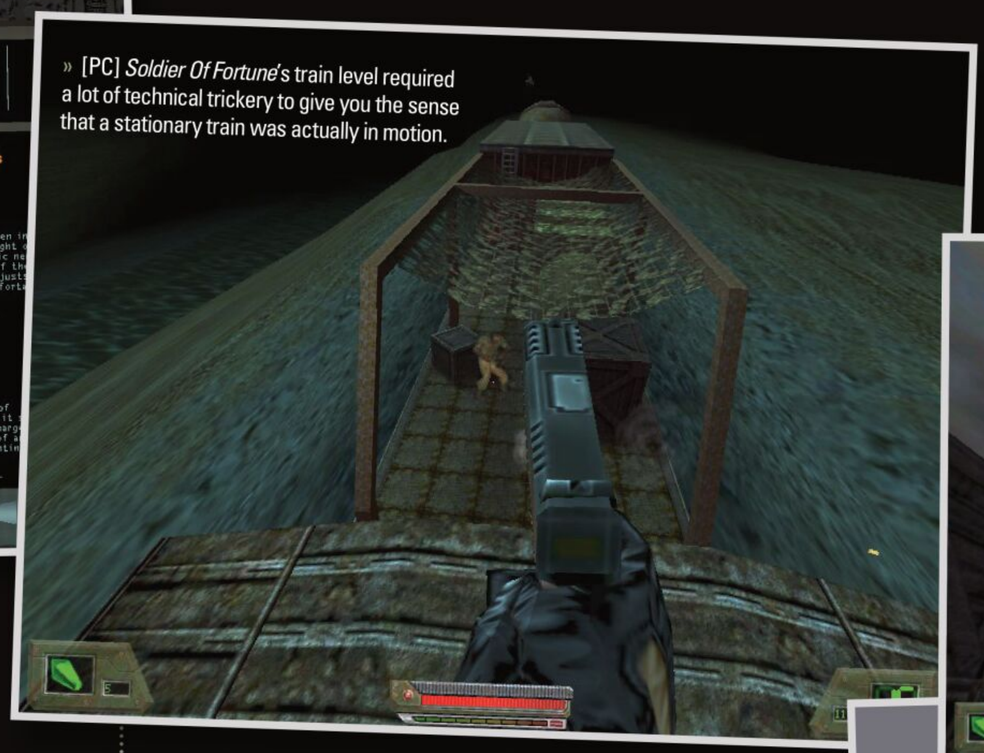
"He had come up with the GHOUL system where he would take a model and break in down into sub-locations, which to my knowledge, had never been done before in a shooter," says Dan. "The closest at the time that I was aware of was a *Quake* mod called *Action Quake II* and that was nothing like we were able to do where we were able to say whether you hit someone in the head, or the knee, or the foot.

"I can tell you from the perspective of using it we definitely had to do things that I don't think had ever been done on the art side of things," Dan says on the complexity of implementing the new system. "All of our artists had to designate which triangles on the model belonged to which zone, so we had to come up with a whole scheme of how many zones are we going to have. With being able to shoot limbs off we had to come up with a system that detected, 'OK, well if I'm going to blow a leg off, then I'm going to have to turn off the leg and then put on a cap or something to cover up the hole in the model, and maybe attach a bit of bone, and then also spawn in another copy of the character except with everything but the leg turned off next to it.' Then there were animation concerns. So there was a whole lot of stuff that I don't think other shooters had to deal with at that time.

"Once we had it, we knew it was cool. I would spend just hours playing around with what could we do with it and talking to the animators about what kind of animations we


INVENTORY
50
32
100
Raptor SMG
Submachinegun
AMMO: 5.56 mm
CARTRIDGE:40 magazine
FIRE MODE: Full automatic
RATE OF FIRE: 240 rpm
MUZZLE VELOCITY: 750 mps
WEIGHT: 3.6 kg
WEAPON SLOT COST: 2
The Raptor SMG blurs the lines between assault rifles and submachineguns. Although small and compact like a submachinegun, the weapon is chambered for 5.56mm ammunition, an ammunition type that is usually found in assault rifles. Regardless of classification, this weapon is an efficient, top-of-the-line killing machine.
Ansel N-43 Light
Amplification Goggles
C4 Plastique
SMG, B-42 SHOTGUN, SILVER TALON ***

» [PC] Fitting into the mercenary theme, you can buy weapons and equipment for your loadout from cash you earn.



» [PC] *Soldier Of Fortune*'s train level required a lot of technical trickery to give you the sense that a stationary train was actually in motion.

» [PC] During the game's second mission, you will be terrorised by a helicopter. It's possible to snipe the pilot and take it down quickly.

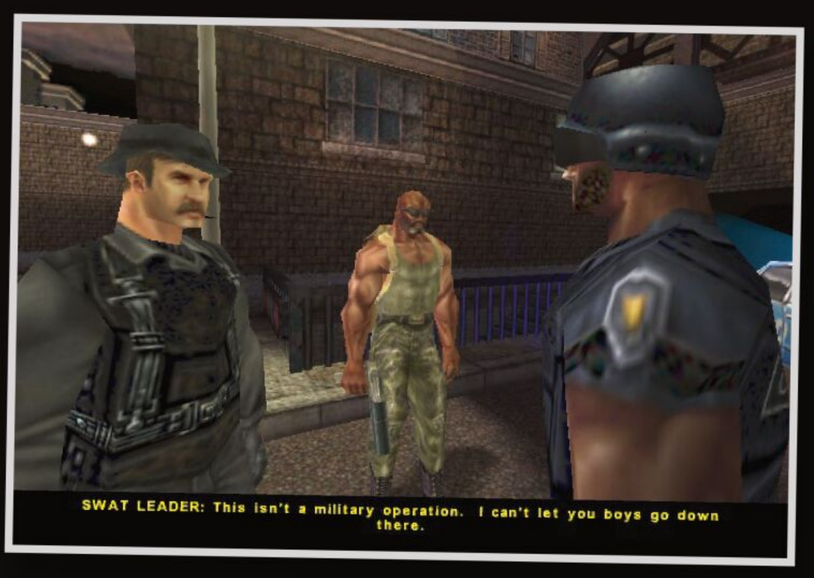
» [PC] Taking in cities and snovy vistas, *SOF* tries to give you a real sense of travelling across the globe.

could make. I remember spending quite a bit of time on some of the special case deaths, like the groin shots, obviously, the real crowd-pleaser. This was, at the time, revolutionary. We knew that people were going to find it different, we hoped cool. Obviously, there were some people who didn't think it was quite so cool."

Soldier Of Fortune's GHOUL system and the flexibility it offered when it came to blowing off limbs and playing special case death animations led to the game attracting a great deal of controversy, up to and including being rated as porn by the British Columbia Film Classification Office. Dan tells us that the team had anticipated that some people would not like the violence in the game, preparing a non-violent version to sell in territories traditionally hostile to more violent games in anticipation, but that they were still surprised at the level of kickback the game faced on release.

From *Mortal Kombat* to *Grand Theft Auto*, there are multiple examples of controversy helping games when it comes to sales and in the year 2000, when *Soldier Of Fortune* came out, we were at a high point of videogames coming under attack from politicians, media commentators and other critics who were blaming the likes of *Doom* and *GoldenEye 007* for school shootings. How did Raven feel about becoming embroiled in this mire? Were they scared? Were they relishing the prospect of a *GTA*-esque sales bump?

"They say no publicity is bad publicity, but we certainly didn't set out to make people angry, so on that side of it I didn't feel good about it," Dan reflects. "I can say that I've written code that Joel Lieberman, who at the time was a senator, specifically called out as, and I'm paraphrasing here, something that would lead to the downfall of Western civilisation. It was kind of terrifying, but also kind of cool. I personally thought the outrage was ridiculous. It was hypocritical. There is violent media in all forms, because violence has been a part of the human experience since it began. It was clear that there were some people out there who were trying to either build their career or further their career by clutching their pearls."



» [PC] John and his buddy Hawk, who will often help you out with info during missions.

The attention that *Soldier Of Fortune* got because of the GHOUL engine and its violent elements has meant that other aspects of the game perhaps didn't get the attention they deserved. *Soldier Of Fortune* experimented with various ideas that felt original at the time, and some would go on to be industry standards. The game had you picking a loadout before you went into a mission, well before *Call Of Duty* popularised that system; it implemented a lean mechanic to let you look around corners; enemies dived and rolled to make them dynamic targets, a move Dan says was championed by gameplay programming director Nathan McKenzie. The game's multiplayer even featured a system (originally planned to be included in the single-player but later removed) where your abilities would be impacted by where you got hit, leg shots slowing you down and arm shots affecting your aim, a pioneering example of the 'realistic deathmatch' mode.

Eric explained that all this and more, from the rolling, the GHOUL system, to the design of levels, was dictated by an overarching vision. "We wanted players to feel like they were the heroes of a movie. We had grown up with stars like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Chuck Norris and Clint Eastwood. We'd seen them be the one-man army that saves the day and takes out the bad guy in whatever way they had to. Everything was rooted in that idea of action movie hero – we kept the movement reasonably fast, the weapons powerful and deadly, and the enemy interactions set so that there was small pacing breaks, but not at the cost of that action movie speed and adrenaline ramp. We also really wanted the player to feel like they were fighting against a somewhat intelligent enemy. The abilities that we gave to the enemy AI were there to help root the player in the fictional world and offer new gameplay but still feed into the core of the hero gameplay."

Dan tells us this all came together in the first two levels the studio made – the first in a New York subway, the second on a moving train – which set the tone for the game. "I didn't know it at the time, but it was kind of a green-light process, to convince ourselves, Activision and the people we were showing it that, yeah, this game is for real." From a confusing magazine licence, to real-life mercenary John Mullins, to an action movie ethos, the studio found a way to make *Soldier Of Fortune* work.

Soldier Of Fortune has tended to be defined by the controversy that surrounded the GHOUL system and its accompanying violence. While we shouldn't downplay the significance of that in terms of the game's success and legacy, it's perhaps worth adjusting our perspective on it. This is a game built by a team who got given a strange concept and tried their best to make something good out of it. This included violence, but it also represented an earnest attempt to do new things that resulted in a distinct, globe-trotting action game. ✱

Peripheral Vision

WaveBird

» **PLATFORM:** GameCube » **RELEASED:** 2002
» **COST:** £34.99 (launch), £70+ (today, boxed) £30+ (today, unboxed)

While many people outside of the *Super Smash Bros* community remember the standard GameCube controller as a little bit of an oddity, the WaveBird has quite a few champions out there. That's because it was one of the first truly reliable wireless controllers available for any console. During the Eighties and Nineties, most wireless controllers had used infra-red communication much like a standard TV remote – which meant that the controller had to be pointed at a receiver box, and if someone walked in front of you, you'd lose control. The WaveBird uses 2.4GHz RF transmission instead, which doesn't require line of sight to the receiver.

The controller itself is much like a regular GameCube controller, just with some added bulk to accommodate a battery compartment. The bottom of the controller also adds a power switch to preserve battery life, and a channel selection switch which is required to keep Wavebirds from interfering with one another, with up to 16 able to operate in the same area. Beyond that, the only major difference is that the WaveBird doesn't have the rumble motors of regular GameCube controllers, likely due to the fact that they would represent a significant drain on the batteries. *

WaveBird Fact

■ Nintendo packaged WaveBird controllers in blister packs as well as boxes. Since the blister packs needed to be destroyed to access the controller, complete blister packs tend to be new and pricey.

ESSENTIAL GAME

F-ZERO GX

Sega's take on Nintendo's classic futuristic racing series is one of the very best GameCube games you can get. It's fast, it's beautiful to look at, and there's plenty to do. You can even unlock the content from the game's arcade counterpart *F-Zero AX*, but to do that you'll need to beat every Grand Prix in master mode and complete the story on very hard. That's no easy task, so if you're the sort of person who is prone to throwing a controller in anger, we recommend the WaveBird – at the very least, you won't pull the GameCube off the shelf when you do boil over.

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

HORACE

A passion project a decade in the making, Horace is a sweeping epic made up of a magpie of references. We delve into the mind of creator Paul Helman and discover how he made a 'SNES blockbuster' that's also in debt to British computer games

Words by Alan Wen

Back in 2010, Paul Helman downloaded GameMaker with the idea of making "a quick game". Almost a decade later, and that reads like the biggest understatement. For a 2D platformer, *Horace* is cinematically sprawling in scope, jam-packed with ideas from all over the place, which still somehow connect with some bizarre logic. All essentially from the mind of one man.

Of course, it wasn't in development for that entire time, the titular robot character only taking shape in 2012. As a game artist, best known for his work on *Die Hard Trilogy* in 1996, Paul was freelancing on different projects, including "that terrible *Doctor Who* game on Wii".

"I was just taking anything to pay the bills whilst working on Horace in my spare time," he tells **Retro Gamer**. "It was working for six or seven hours on paid work, and then working another six or seven hours in the evening on *Horace*."

With its precise platforming mechanics, *Super Mario World* was a clear inspiration. Indeed, the SNES was a defining period for Paul in his teenage years that he likens *Horace* to what a "triple-A SNES game" would be like. But compared to retro-looking indies that emulate 8-bit or 16-bit graphics, he also takes some liberties. For instance, the pixel art for the characters' faces are more detailed and expressive, using double the pixels of a typical SNES character. The visuals also occasionally veer into 3D with basic polygons as Paul admits his memories of the SNES overlap with the early PlayStation period. "I just didn't really want to constrict myself too much," he says. "Basically, in my head, if it looked right, it was fine!"

However, peer further into *Horace* and it's possible to see the influences also go back to the Eighties Spectrum and Commodore heyday. In fact, strip the game down to its bare essentials and it's a modern *Jet Set Willy* where you're collecting thousands of items in a big house. The 8-bit Speccy aesthetic even shows up during one inspired sequence, with a cheeky nod to Spectrum game *Horace Goes Skiing*, although Paul had ditched the idea of making a whole game around this art style, "Fifteen or twenty hours of literally teletext graphics might have been a bit much for most people."

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** 505 GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** PAUL HELMAN & SEAN SCAPLEHORN
- **RELEASE:** OUT NOW
- **PLATFORM:** PC, SWITCH
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

» [PC] Robot shields take the blow for Horace once, although there's still certain occasions where they won't have any effect.

» [PC] For all its cartoony 16-bit aesthetic, *Horace* also has its share of bad language and some genuinely disturbing scenes.

More than just making a souped up SNES or Spectrum game however, *Horace* is modern in how story-focused it is. Just the opening chapter is packed with cutscenes – not just dialogue boxes but actual voiced cutscenes that cut to close-ups or carefully composed shots that still use the pixel art in ingenious ways. It's cinematic enough to give Hideo Kojima a run for his money. "As I got old, I found myself playing more narrative games," Paul explains. "I find myself more compelled to keep going to see what happens in the plot. I mean, I played *Mario Odyssey* but actually got bored halfway through. Meanwhile, the last few games I completed were *Final Fantasy VI* and *IX* for the umpteenth time. I find myself more compelled to finish a story than I am to finish a game."

The other important aspect of *Horace* comes down to Paul's love of film and TV, mirrored by Horace whose knowledge of the world is through television and videogames. Although the playable character in *Jet Set Willy* was a miner, Paul thought his silhouette made him more like a butler with a posh bowler hat, which he then made an association with Peter Seller's character in the 1979 film *Being There*.

That film was about a middle-aged and simple-minded gardener who's cast into the wider world after his wealthy benefactor dies. There's certainly similarities to *Horace*'s robot who is raised by a gentle, old man, apart from the bit where he wakes up in a post-apocalyptic future trying to reunite with the remaining members of his adopted family. It's one of many loose threads that holds the game together. It's a running theme with Paul, where one idea leads to another, giving some insight to how his mind all comes back to a

MEET THE CAST

THE BIG AND BRIGHT CAST OF HORACE

HORACE: The star of the game is a yellow robot that's been raised to live among human beings, although the rest of his kind are either slaves or killing machines. His knowledge of the world is through television and videogames, although other gaps can always be filled by installing new software.

THE OLD MAN: The gentle Old Man is the scientist responsible for creating Horace. He acts as his adoptive father, introducing him to his family and mansion, also essentially acting as the game's benevolent tutorial. Unfortunately, he also suffers a heart attack and dies early on.

HEATHER: The Old Man's daughter is initially afraid of and untrusting of Horace. However she soon warms to him after being rescued from an accident, becoming like his sister. She is just as tech-savvy as her parents, learning to fix up Horace or upgrade his software.

MR SILTON: A thief turned driver for the Old Man, Mr Silton is a shady sort but has his heart in the right place, even though the story's events take him back to his criminal way of life. His appearance is actually based on Paul himself.

ANTON DECK: Working as the butler to the Old Man's brother the Professor, Mr Deck isn't a big fan of Horace, referring to him as a "yellow bastard". When he winds up becoming a TV presenter for a show called *Trust Me, I'm a Celebrity*, he's even more of a villain.

HORACE'S MINI ADVENTURES

THERE'S DOZENS OF MINIGAMES, SOME WITH A FAMILIAR TWIST

TENNIS

Horace gets a thorough education of videogames early on, and no history of the medium is complete without *Pong*. Well, except this version is dressed up in slightly nicer visuals with actual racquets and a green law, and it's the first of many minigame pastiches you'll encounter.

RHYTHM KING

With music being an important part of *Horace*, so are rhythm-based minigames. At an arcade, you'll actually come across a *Guitar Hero*-type game called *Rhythm King*. But the same note-chart rhythm-tapping gameplay is replicated in other moments, like when Mr Preston teaches Horace to play drums.

TEA ROOM AND CAFE

Need to scrape together some cash? There's jobs you can take for that. The first of these is helping dry the dishes in a cafe kitchen by catching the plates chucked out by the middle-aged dish-washing ladies. You can unlock higher difficulties to earn even more money.

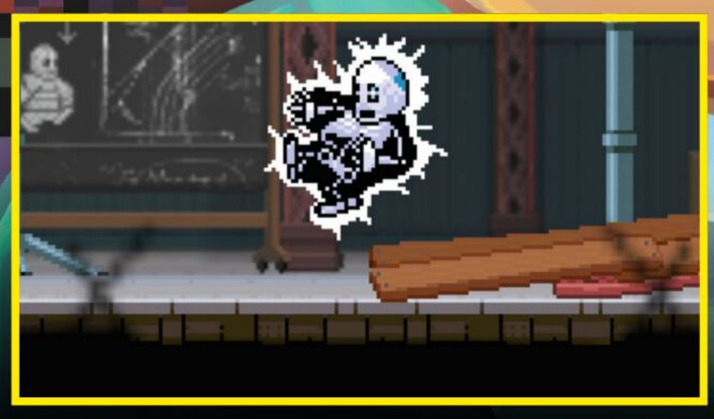
DANCE INVADER

In-game arcades are host to actual playable arcade cabinets, each riffing off a classic arcade game. *Dance Invader* is basically *Space Invaders*, with the twist that you're actually playing the alien, defending itself against a horde of… linedancers? Well, OK, the *Thriller*-esque dancing zombies are a bit more menacing.

DAY OFF

Horace's parody of films also crosses over into minigames. This homage to *Out Run*, though a little rough with handling, references *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, which of course also featured a red Ferrari. Another ingenious example is a *Pac-Man* spoof that crosses over with *Ghostbusters*.

» [PC] Bosses are big dramatic affairs, sometimes morphing into bullet hell. Fortunately, they also have checkpoints.



» [PC] Horace faces many deadly one-hit traps though getting electrocuted is almost certainly the most common hazard.

ridiculous number of Nineties pop culture references, some charmingly naff, and utterly British – what other game would reference the incredibly long-running quiz show *Catchphrase* or Ant & Dec, or long-forgotten high-street shops like Our Price and Littlewoods?

Explaining how these homages and sight gags keep popping up, he says, "If I start writing something, my brain would then be like 'Oh, this is a bit like that scene in that TV show, or film, or whatever'. So I would just put references in the background relating to whatever characters were saying. I probably have some form of ADHD where I can't concentrate properly, so I just keep everything moving by dropping in other things."

One rather inspired gag relates to the character Mr Silton, where the inevitable penny drops that his two friends Mr Preston and Mr Logan are basically Bill and Ted – they even used to play in a band. Yet that had also morphed from how Paul had originally envisioned them.

Paul continues, "I basically drew myself as three different characters because when I was younger, I had really long hair. In my twenties I had very short blonde hair, then from my thirties onwards, I went very bald. But as it developed, I realised that the blonde fella playing the drums kind of looked like Bill, while the fella with the long hair playing the guitar kind of looked like Ted." As the game also features a time-travel plot point, the gag just wrote itself.

Horace is crammed with ideas and features then (not to mention one-off diversions from its 2D platforming, especially with dozens of charming minigames), to the point that making the game would be impossible to do alone, or would probably still be unfinished. That's ultimately how Sean Scaplehorn became involved as a co-developer to handle the programming side, doing in a matter of weeks what Paul admits took him years.

"Before, most of the time was me having to look online reading tutorials on how to do the coding for the bits I wanted to do," he laughs. "I could throw some stuff together, but it was taking ages. When Sean came on board, we upgraded from GameMaker to Unity."

Having another person involved however also meant taking the project a serious step up so that the two could actually work on it full-time and paid. After securing a deal with publisher 505 Games, who started funding development from September 2015, the pair were able to work on Horace full-time and finish a chapter every couple of months instead of the six to twelve months it was taking Paul previously.

Even with funding, getting *Horace*'s vision and scope still required some creative tricks.

» [PC] Larger junk takes longer for Horace to clean up, although you'll be able to improve the time it takes with upgrades.

» [PC] The town of Sitcombe has NPCs resembling sitcom characters. Not that they're explicitly named but you'll recognise their faces.

» [PC] Shops have upgrades for Horace if you have the cash. You can also sell junk at the scrapyard.

With all the obvious parodies and pastiches, it's a wonder lawyers never came knocking – after all, a YouTuber received copyright strikes against their videos around the time of *Horace*'s release where they used a parody of the original 8-bit Horace character in their videos.

Horace uses a lot of music, as Paul wanted a cinematic feel, "Lots of cinema relies on pop songs and familiar music for dramatic purposes." While many are his own compositions, he also made deliberate pastiches of pop music. "I was reading about how other people get away with writing parody songs, and as long as you write a piece of music that doesn't have four notes in the same order, you can get away with effectively the same tune by changing every fourth note!"

More recognisable however are a host of classical pieces available in the public domain, such as Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, played during the title screen, or Richard Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, which most people would associate with *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Voice acting was also key to producing emotional scenes, but was, again, outside of *Horace*'s budget. Instead, Paul opted for the affordable solution of text-to-speech synthesis, the robotic tones an obvious fit for Horace, who doesn't just become the narrator but also reports the other characters' speech, often to dry, comical effect.

"Obviously, I also had it at my fingertips, so it was easy to record any new lines of dialogue," he adds. "As soon as we realised that all this extra section needs a prompt or whatever, I'd bust out the dialogue in five minutes, and we'd get it straight into the game. It was much easier than having to book another recording session and get someone to actually do it."

Despite the attention paid on making an emotionally resonating epic, that doesn't stop *Horace* from being a frankly challenging platformer in the vein of the one-hit masochism of *Super Meat Boy* combined with an occasionally confusing Metroidvania layout. This was further tested by the unique but disorientating anti-gravity boots that let Horace run on walls and ceilings.

That level of challenge was supported by 505 producer Dean Scott, who had pushed for, in his own words, a "proper" game. Yet that desire to find out what happens next is frequently compounded by lengthy sequences where one mistake sends you back to the beginning of a room, as well as moments where it's not clear where to go next. Paul admits some updates were made to assist frustrated players, such as the 'pity' shields that would spawn after dying too many times. "To be honest, I wish we'd expanded on that idea just to make it easier for people that are not very good at games," he says.

It's a shame that the difficulty spikes have reportedly prevented many players from seeing the story through to the end. Perhaps easily sinking into the crowd of other nostalgia-baiting indie platformers on Steam without a bigger name, it's also far from being considered a sleeper hit, despite receiving positive reviews when it was released on PC in 2019. On consolation, after a lot of haranguing with 505 Games, a Switch port released last year may give it a better chance, while Nintendo's console is a natural home for a game intended as a SNES blockbuster platformer. Paul also jokes about porting it to a Commodore version.

Nonetheless, he's already planning his next game, which he describes as being "just as meta and time travel and character-based as *Horace*, so I'm sure that'll take me another ten years!". Hopefully, we won't have to wait as long, because such a singular mind, as messy, offbeat and charming as *Horace* – harking back to the raw unchecked spirit of bedroom coders in the Eighties – is something we need more of. That he also hints about wanting to create something emulating *Grand Theft Auto* or the early PlayStation games also points to an aesthetic still waiting to be explored. ✱

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

OLD!
retro GAMER
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES
SIGN UP!
THE MAKING OF DRIVER
IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER
SINCLAIR ZX80
THE MACHINE THAT KICK-STARTED THE SUCCESS OF SIR CLIVE SINCLAIR
WARIO
A LOOK BACK AT THE EXPLOITS OF MARIO'S EVIL NEMESIS
JOHN GIBSON
MYSTICAL NINJA

Info

- **System:** PC, PS4, Xbox One, Stadia
- **Year:** 2019
- **Publisher:** Rockstar Games
- **Developer:** Rockstar Studios
- **Key People:** Dan Houser (co-writer), Woody Jackson (composer), Roger Clark (lead actor)

Go Deeper

» Modern-day Pinkertons sent a cease and desist order to Rockstar for using the agency's name without consent. The complaint was eventually withdrawn.

» Benjamin Byron Davis and Rob Wiethoff reprised their roles of Dutch Van Der Linde and John Marston respectively for the prequel.

» [PS4] Sadie is one of the standout characters with a strong story arc. She could've been a protagonist, really.

In a time where open-world games were ten a penny, a slumbering Rockstar roused to remind the world that it was still king at delivering immersive experiences and slammed down its usurpers with this cowboy classic

Words by Drew Sleep

RED DEAD REDEMPTION II

THE BACKGROUND

For better or worse, when Rockstar stirs, the gaming press whips up into a frenzy. In 2016, the company posted an image of its logo, and the whole world began furiously speculating on what it could mean. Not long afterwards, Rockstar revealed it was ready to unveil its follow-up to the acclaimed *Red Dead Redemption*, a 2010 Western classic forged in the same mould as the company's world-dominating *Grand Theft Auto* series.

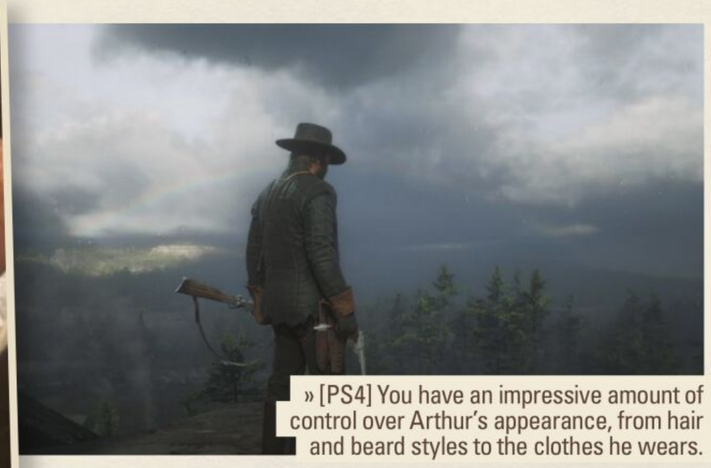
Before the game hit stores, however, damning news reports surfaced surrounding Rockstar's crunch culture and how its developers were working to breaking point to get the game to market. This was one of the most anticipated videogames of all time, and Rockstar couldn't afford to fail. The company vowed to do better, but many thought it was an empty gesture. And then the game arrived to a wave of acclaim, and most of the discourse around crunch fizzled away.

THE GAME

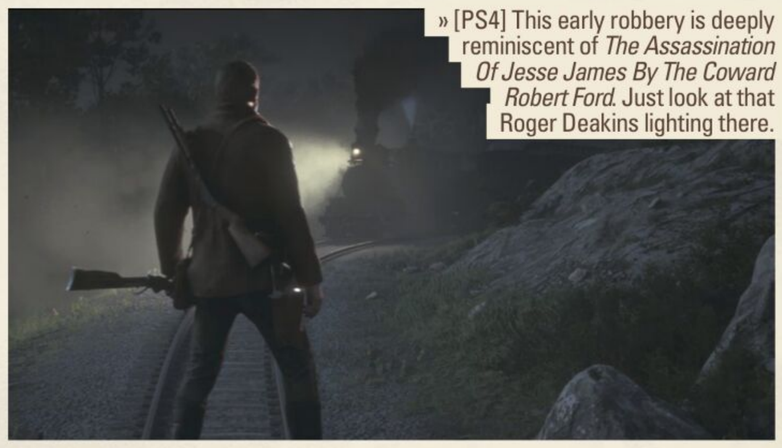
The development team at Rockstar poured *everything* they had and more into *Red Dead Redemption II*, and it shows. This is, frankly, not only the best open-world game to date but also one of the greatest games of all time, eclipsing all of Rockstar's past efforts by a country mile. What sets this apart from the likes of *Horizon Zero Dawn*, *Assassin's Creed Origins* and even *Grand Theft Auto* is its attention to detail. This recreation of the twilight era of Wild West America oozes authenticity, from its period-accurate store catalogues, to sweeping vistas and frontier staples.

Often, Wild West stories are slow burns, and *Red Dead Redemption II* takes that in its stride. This is a game that patiently takes its time and wants you to slowly drink in its atmosphere and systems-led game design. If you approach it like you're expecting rootin' tootin' cowboy shootin' where there's a gunfight behind every saloon door, then

» [PS4] Hosea tries to keep Arthur grounded in the more 'noble' outlaw lifestyle, while Dutch becomes obsessed with 'one last score'.



» [PS4] You have an impressive amount of control over Arthur's appearance, from hair and beard styles to the clothes he wears.



» [PS4] This early robbery is deeply reminiscent of *The Assassination Of Jesse James By The Coward Robert Ford*. Just look at that Roger Deakins lighting there.

» [PS4] John Marston rolls with the Van Der Linde gang in this prequel, and the events of the game tie nicely into the first *Red Dead Redemption*.

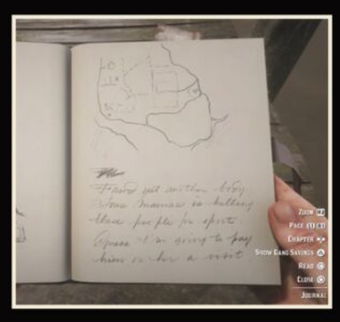
Things of note

DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

The amount of agency you have on the world and your character's appearance is remarkable. We particularly enjoy the real-time hair growth.

PEN MAN

Arthur often reflects in his journal, which can be accessed any time. He even sketches notable landmarks or creatures you come across.



GANG UP

You can relax at your hideout, talking to fellow gang-mates and doing odd jobs. Sometimes, there's even a singalong you can take part in.

LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

Much like any Rockstar game, *Red Dead Redemption II* offers a wealth of things to do, from fishing, dominoes and card games, to stranger encounters and more.

SIDE HUSTLE

There's a wagonload of activities to take on, too. Side-missions are lucrative, while completing challenges such as legendary hunts will unlock unique gear at the trapper.

you'll likely be disappointed. You can still cut loose and go on a rampage as you would in a *GTA* game, but that's not the point. In *Red Dead Redemption II*, you're more likely to spend your time musing over your moustache length, chatting to fellow outlaws, picking herbs or slowly stalking a deer with a bow to score an all-important clean kill.

This slower, more considered pace is reflected in the story. Set in 1899, 12 years before the events of the first game, you step into the spurs of Arthur Morgan a long-standing and trusted member of the Van Der Linde gang – the remnants of which John Marston has to hunt a decade later. The story begins with the aftermath of a botched ferry heist where things turned uncharacteristically cruel after the gang's leader, Dutch, killed an innocent bystander in cold blood. This plants the seeds of doubt in Arthur's mind, and they grow across the course of the 30-hour story as the once-charismatic leader unravels as the 'new world' catches up with the gang's obsolete way of life.

Arthur is a great character to inhabit. While *Grand Theft Auto V* lets you choose between three characters on-the-fly, Rockstar reverted to a single protagonist for this western epic, and the result is a much more focused story and a relatable 'hero' you end up genuinely caring for. After a stark reminder of his mortality, as well as feeling the pinch of an inescapable bounty on his head, Arthur questions his allegiance to his gang, which has ostensibly been his family for his entire life, and the ensuing tale of internal conflict plays out to a satisfying conclusion worthy of standing shoulder to shoulder with the likes of *Unforgiven*, *True Grit* and more.

The supporting cast are well-rounded characters, too, and show that Rockstar is moving away from its two-dimensional caricatures from its past. Though the company's large roster of male protagonists is starting to get ridiculous; would it kill Rockstar to have a female in a starring role one of these days?

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Rockstar games will always be multi-million-selling juggernauts because the company has cultivated a huge following over its 22-year lifespan. That success is well-deserved, mind you: it makes best-in-class immersive open worlds populated with countless things to occupy your time. However, *Red Dead Redemption II* demonstrates that the company can keep that virtuoso open-world design and move away from its reference-a-minute *Grand Theft Auto* stories, and follow a path of storytelling acclaim blazed by the likes of *The Last Of Us*, *The Witcher 3* and more.

It will be fascinating to see if Rockstar can apply this new sensibility to its more tongue-in-cheek *GTA* games. It's clear that the company will continue to court controversy, however, if it keeps up this 'new vision' for its products; this new era of Rockstar will be the best yet.

LAURANT WEILL

Laurant Weill kickstarted videogame development in France when he launched the country's first software house, Loriciel, in Paris in 1983. He now hopes his new venture will make developers of us all

Words by David Crookes

Laurant Weill could easily be described as the father of the French videogame industry. In launching Loriciels (later called Loriciel) with Marc Bayle, he created France's first videogame company, and he also helped create many other notable French software houses, chief among them Brøderbund France, Evolution and Elliot Grassiano's Microïds. With an emphasis on invention and innovation, Laurant steered his companies to push the technologies of the day and create new ways to play. This was certainly true of his next company, Visiware, which led the market in the development of games for TV set-top boxes and created a system that would allow people to play along with broadcast quiz shows. Today, Laurant wants others to be creative so he is busy heading up AOZ Studio. The company is working on a new BASIC programming language which is built upon the hugely popular AMOS and STOS languages from 30 years ago.

How did you get started in the videogame industry?
Well, at first, it was like many other people: I was interested in the computers that were coming out at the time. I'd already been building electronic devices such as home-made alarms and I enjoyed creating stuff. But it was when I was doing my military service around 1982 that I tried to take things up a level.

What did you do?
I created my own computer from scratch with two other crazy guys – this big, one-by-one metre thing where all the components were wired individually. I have to say, we created something unique, a great 16-bit computer, but when we took it to a French manufacturer called Thomson, the boss wasn't interested. I guess, we were like 18 to 20 years old and you can imagine what he was thinking. But he said something that I have remembered all my life. He said 'No thank you. We don't trust in 16-bit computers. We believe the market is going to stay 8-bit for many years'. And then eight months later, there was the Macintosh and, later, the Amiga and the Atari ST. Our machine was more powerful than the Mac at the time but we just found nobody to make it.

How did you respond?
I gave up on the idea and I created a computer shop with a friend in Paris instead. And that was great. At the time computer shops were more than shops. They were really a place where everybody gathered, exchanging ideas and programs. It was very exciting and challenging. Then one day, I found a magazine and there was a small article, like five lines, saying there was a company in England building a new computer based on the 6502 chip. This was Tangerine which was creating the Oric. The following day, I took a plane to England and I went to see the people at Tangerine, signing an exclusive contract with them to become the official Oric distributor in France.

Did the Oric sell well?
Yes, it did and, as well as selling other's people's applications and games, I started to publish software written by myself and people who were visiting the shop. That's why I created Loriciel in September 1983, joined by a gentleman called Marc Bayle about six months later. Loriciel became the first French videogame company and it was a very exciting and interesting time. You have to remember that the industry was just nonexistent so we had to invent everything such as the packaging and the price of distribution. At first we'd have cassettes with a photocopied inlay. Super basic. We also published tools and general software.

You had an eye on 16-bit computers, but Loriciel was very much an 8-bit developer for a long time. Why was that?
Simply because that was the user base in France at the time. The Oric was the main machine for a while – the biggest market for the computer – and I don't know if you've ever used it but it was a great machine. We made a lot of games for the Thomson and Amstrad CPC computers too. So yes, we were just following the market and everybody was discovering and creating. I'd started from nothing and I was seeing the industry grow so fast.

A lot of your earlier games were made for these three computers, weren't they?
They were. And there's a funny story about the Thomson MO5 which had a light pen accessory that allowed users to point and draw on the screen. When we started distributing games, I hired a stock manager who was a very nice guy and was about our age, 22. And he wanted to do things as

AOZ
STUDIO
“I created my own computer from scratch with two other crazy guys”
Laurant Weill

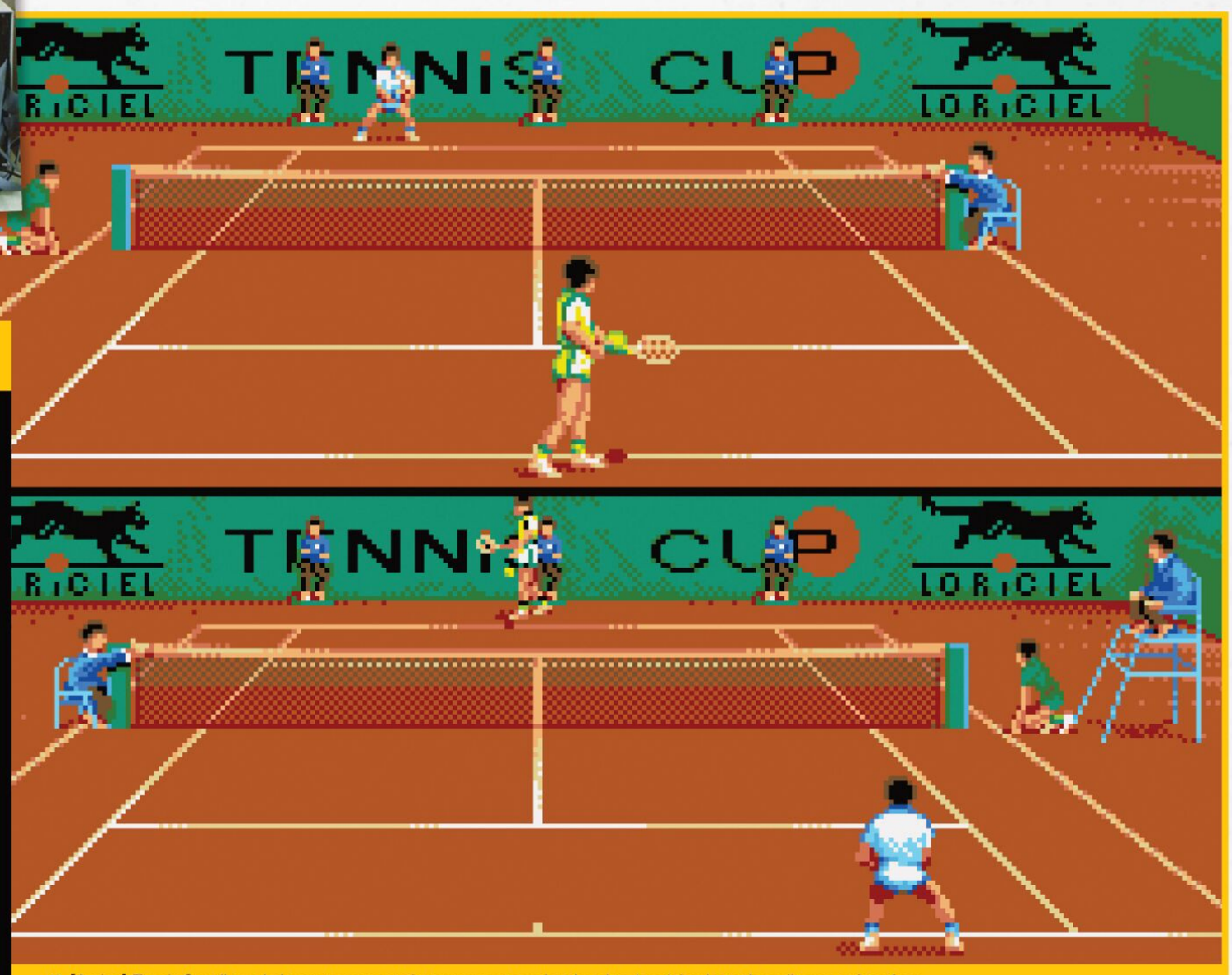
» The development kit used by Loriciel to create games for Amstrad's ill-fated GX4000 console

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **HU*BERT** [1983] ORIC, COMMODORE 64
- **GALAXION** [1983] ORIC, ALICE 32/90
- **LE GÉNÉRAL** [1984] ORIC
- **INTOX ET ZOÉ** [1984] ORIC, THOMSON MO
- **L'AIGLE D'OR** [1984] ORIC, AMSTRAD CPC, THOMSON MO, THOMSON TO
- **THE FIFTH AXIS** [1985] AMSTRAD CPC, COMMODORE 64, THOMSON MO, THOMSON TO
- **MAZE MAX** [1985] MSX
- **BACTRON** [1986] AMSTRAD CPC, THOMSON MO
- **SAPIENS** [1986] AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, DOS, THOMSON MO, THOMSON TO
- **MAGNETIK TANK** [1986] AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, DOS, THOMSON MO
- **ZOX 2099** [1987] AMSTRAD CPC
- **TURBO CUP** [1988] AMSTRAD CPC, ZX SPECTRUM, AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS, THOMSON TO
- **STAR TRAP** [1988] AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST
- **ATOMIC DRIVER** [1988] AMSTRAD CPC
- **SKWEEK** [1989] AMSTRAD CPC, AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS, GAME GEAR, TURBOGRAFX-16
- **PINBALL MAGIC** [1989] AMSTRAD CPC, AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS
- **SUPER SKWEEK** [1990] AMSTRAD CPC, AMIGA, ATARI ST, LYNX
- **THE MAGICIAN** [1990] AMIGA, ATARI ST
- **TENNIS CUP** [1990] AMSTRAD CPC, AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS, TURBOGRAFX-16, TURBOGRAFX CD
- **WEST PHASER** [1989] AMSTRAD CPC, AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS
- **GOLDEN EAGLE** [1991] CPC, AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS
- **BUILDERLAND: THE STORY OF MELBA** [1991] AMSTRAD CPC, AMIGA, ATARI ST, TURBOGRAFX CD
- **COPTER 271** [1991] AMSTRAD PLUS/GX4000
- **D-DAY** [1992] AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS
- **DAVIS CUP TENNIS** [1993] MEGA DRIVE
- **INTERNATIONAL TENNIS TOUR** [1993] SNES
- **JIM POWER: THE LOST DIMENSION IN 3-D** [1993] DOS, SNES
- **TOMMY MOE'S WINTER EXTREME: SKIING AND SNOWBOARDING** [1994] SNES
- **PROST GRAND PRIX 1998** [1998] DOS, WINDOWS
- **ARABIAN NIGHTS** [2001] WINDOWS
- **PLANET OF THE APES** [2001] WINDOWS, PLAYSTATION

» [Amstrad CPC] Detailed animations attracted players to the isometric action game *Cobra* which got an outing on the CPC, Thomson TO and DOS.



» [Amiga] *Tennis Cup* allowed players to compete in tournaments and go head-to-head thanks to the split-screen interface.

properly as possible. It was his first day and he said 'What can I do?' and I said ask the developers if they need anything. So he went to the programmers and they said 'Yes there is something urgent – please can you buy me some ink for this pen?'. So the poor guy spent the afternoon shopping around Paris asking for ink for the electronic pen. And he came back, tired, worried he was going to be fired. We had a fun bunch at Loriciel.

Did you find it easy to attract developers to the company?
At the very beginning, we were relying on the super science geeks who were visiting the shop and that allowed us to build up a pool of developers. Marc also developed some games – he was an engineer and we met when he was writing for one of the big magazines and wanted to interview me. What we found, though, was that we quickly built a reputation as a company that people had to offer their games to first. We were quite lucky and it meant we were being given the first option on so many amazing games, allowing us to cherry-pick. From about 1986, we then started to hire developers internally too.

Is it true that the Amstrad CPC was a particularly important computer in France?
Yes, it was very important. I was often in contact with the CEO of Amstrad France, Marion Vannier, just as I was in contact with lots of CEOs including Jack Tramiel who gave me an Atari ST which I still have. I also met Chuck Peddle who designed the 6502 microprocessor and the Commodore PET but, yes, I knew the Amstrad team very well although I met Alan Sugar maybe once, very briefly. I remember one very long negotiation with Amstrad France on behalf of another company I created called Evolution which had created a best-selling word processor and our Amstrad friends wanted to bundle it with every PC1512. The negotiation took forever – something like three weeks and it was about reducing the price over and over. In the end, Marion called me and said 'OK, we are OK, but I have a last request. I want the manual to be properly bound because I want everything to be done properly'. It wasn't expected but it meant we could accept and sign.

Other publishers were emerging but it didn't take long for Loriciel to establish itself in France, did it?
Loriciel was unique in the market in terms of the originality we brought in terms of the products. We tried each time to push the boundaries in terms of technology and to bring something new and original in terms of the product or in terms of marketing.

Did you have any favourite games?
Well, if you ask people here which are the most famous games of Loriciel, they will probably give you ten or twelve but I would say *L'aigle D'or* is the most iconic one – *The Golden Eagle*. We sold a huge number for that game. Later we had *Turbo Cup*, a racing game that we sold in the UK because we'd opened an office in Birmingham in partnership with a company called Elite. *Turbo Cup* was sold with a limited edition 1:20 model of a Porsche because we were the sponsor of four-times Paris-Dakar winner René Metge. We also had *Panza Kick Boxing* which comes to mind but there were so many. It's hard to say which were the best, though.

You remained interested in hardware, too, didn't you?
Yes. One of the things we made was a game with a lightgun called the West Phaser. It was basically a big package with the gun and the software and we shared a routine which would let users program their own games for it.

Did you ever consider going further and making a console?
No. I did have an idea of creating a new form of computer which I never took the time to finish and I can't say much more because I have not patented it.

But no. What we did do, was make good use of the Minitel viewdata service which was run by the state in France. It was accessed using a unique device – about 20 centimetres by 20 centimetres with a screen and keyboard – and every household had one to replace the Yellow Pages. It was a huge success and kind of world wide web but simple and low resolution. We found out that there was a modem inside so we created Loritel which was software and a cable that connected to the Minitel and made use of the modem. We did that for many computers and it allowed people to download software and games for a low price and talk with others.

So it wasn't solely about the games for you?
Well actually, we felt Minitel was very useful, allowing you to look for information and visit popular dating services. So we thought, why don't we transform the Game Boy into a portable Minitel? We did a cartridge that would slot into the Game Boy and there was a plug at the other end for the phone line. But that was never sold because I met the CEO of Nintendo France and he didn't like the idea. But I still have the prototype and it showed how interesting those times were. There were lots of ideas and experiments.

Were you involved in any others experiments around this time?
One day a guy at the office came to me and showed how he'd replaced the head of a dot matrix printer with a photoelectric cell so that an image could be fed into the machine and be scanned. It created a super basic scanner but we used it to make a game, *Bob Winner*, telling a graphic artist that he could draw a background and characters on paper and scan it in. So yes, we liked to come up with new ways of programming and make use of a new technology.

You also branched into 3D, didn't you?
We did, with *Jim Power: The Lost Dimension In 3-D*, a game that had music by a German composer, Chris Huelsbeck. We'd made a game called *Jim Power In Mutant Planet* on the Amiga, Atari ST and Amstrad CPC and it was super big, like 12 levels of scrolling. Very nicely made and a big success. At the time, I had a pair of 3D spectacles – the ones with a blue and red filter – because there was a show on TV. I was joking in the office and looking at the *Jim Power* game but I felt something weird. I felt it would work well in 3D so while the developers began working on the new game, I looked for the owner of the patent for the spectacles which was hard. I had to go to the US, then back to Germany, spending two days to trace the guy. I finally found him and signed the contract, then we bought the spectacles and bundled the new game, *Jim Power: The Lost Dimension In 3-D* on the SNES, Mega Drive and DOS, with the 3D spectacles. I'm not sure but it was probably one of the first of its kind and still very cheap although I had to make sure that it would not damage people's eyes before we sold it.

When you were creating products like these, were you creating them primarily for the French market? Or were you thinking in more global terms?
At the beginning, it was France-only. French software houses had a reputation for being very creative across the world but they weren't very well organised or marketing and sales-minded. So at first we looked to establish ourselves in France but, sure, the rest of the world was important. We had a long-term partnership with Brøderbund

» A one-metre long poster showcasing Loriciel's current crop of wares.

» [Amiga] *Baby Jo – Going Home* was a fun, cutesy arcade platformer released in 1991.

> "France was still our biggest market and we could only really focus on the computers that were strong in France"
> Laurant Weill

FIVE TO PLAY

Key titles Laurant Weill has been involved with

JIM POWER: THE LOST DIMENSION IN 3-D

■ Already blessed with a sense of depth thanks to the dizzying parallax scrolling background which even moves in different directions, the graphics of this SNES game were taken up a notch if you donned the pair of 3D glasses that came in the box. Snazzy Mode 7 effects and great graphic detail couldn't hide the fact the game was frustratingly hard, though.

SKWEEK

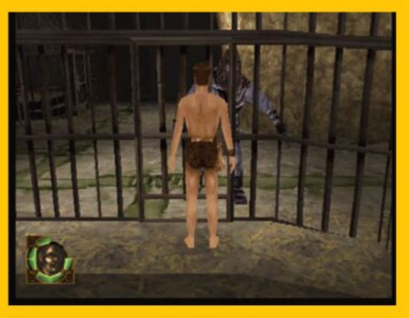
■ This riff on *Q*bert* gave you a simple task: change the blue tiles to pink by walking over them. This was complicated by the introduction of enemies and hazards but players could at least blast back or hang around for teddy bears to appear since collecting them would also let you progress. A development version ended up being sold on the UK market which contained a profanity. Naughty!

SAPIENS

■ Developed by Didier and Oliver Guillon (aka Myriad) and making use of (slow) fractal graphics, Laurant says the action adventure *Sapiens* was one his favourite games – an example of how French developers pushed the technology of the day. *Sapiens* is set 100,000 years ago and has an emphasis on survival. Players could tackle the game in multiple ways as you have freedom to decide where you want to go.

SUPER PINBALL MAGIC

■ Loriciel was asked by Amstrad to create games for the GX4000 console and it published *Copter 271*, *Panza Kickboxing*, *Tennis Cup 2* and *Super Pinball Magic*. The latter, a port of *Pinball Magic*, moved from the four-colour Mode 1 to the expanded palette of Mode 0 while also ensuring it made use of some of the extra features of the GX4000/Plus machines over the standard Amstrad CPC.



PLANET OF THE APES

■ This tie-in with the *Planet Of The Apes* film was something relatively new for Laurant who tended not to seek such licences when heading Loriciel. Created by his new company, Visiware, which tended to develop casual games for TV set-top boxes, it was a single-player action-adventure made for the PC and PlayStation on behalf of fellow French firm Ubisoft. But, unfortunately, it wasn't a great game.

Software so we would sell *Prince Of Persia* and *Lode Runner* – Brøderbund was a very nice company and I'm still friends with the CEO Doug Carlston. But the biggest market for us outside France was Japan. We were doing a lot of revenue there and one of our main clients was Hudson Soft which was known for *Bomberman*. The UK was the next most important market but the British software houses were better at selling abroad than the French ones.

A good number of your Amstrad CPC games did well in the UK, didn't they?
They did.

A colleague, Rory Milne, was wondering why these games were not converted in great numbers to the Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum?
That's because France was still by far our biggest market and we could only really focus on the computers that were strong in France. This period was incredible for Britain, though. Everything was invented in Britain and the country had some geniuses: the guys who created the Spectrum, the Amstrad and even the Dragon 32. All this was coming from England and the French computers – the Thomson MO5, the TO7/70 – they were never truly competitive with the British, you know.

And yet the French still had this strong reputation for innovation. Why were developers in France so keen on getting the most out of their computers?
The extra mile in creativity was seen as important but that sometimes resulted in very weird software.

You didn't particularly chase arcade licences. Why was that?
Companies like US Gold and Elite were very much about doing conversions but I don't think we did a single one. I can't remember. We bought licences such as *Buck Rogers* and we'd do deals with famous kickboxers, football players and car drivers but I liked original games such as *The Fifth Axis* and *Sapiens*. They were made by Didier and Olivier Guillion, two brothers who were brilliant for us. They would basically send me their games totally finished so while we'd call ourselves publishers, we were doing nothing with these games. They even sent us the text to put on the back of the packaging and they'd take care of everything such as the music and the protection. So yes, sometimes the publisher existed only to manufacture, run adverts and take care of the distribution. And in the case of *The Fifth Axis* and *Sapiens*, they'd be innovating with hi-res, fast animations which was special.

Why did Loriciel fail?
In the beginning, we sold our games through a distributor called Innelec which still exists. It did all the work to build a strong network and allowed us to sell our software in shops. Loriciel also worked with another distributor. We made a big mistake, though, when one day we found that we were relying too much on these companies and they were trying to drive our creative process. We were young and wanted the development of our software to be independent and we became anxious that we were being tied. So we decided to build our own distribution, Loridif, and hired our own salespeople. But this was a big mistake, too, because we didn't create the distribution arm as a separate company. So because the market had a lot of ups and downs we suffered. Shops would be returning goods, stopping orders and it became hard. We couldn't just close down the distribution arm because it was completely internal and that is why Loriciel ended.

You moved on, creating Visiware. This concentrated on a very different type of platform, didn't it?
Yes. Loriciel had been bought by another French company but I didn't want to join this because the videogame market was not as exciting as it had been in the Eighties. It was difficult to be as motivated because it was becoming a very organised business with very known processes and regulation by the Nintendos and Segas of this world. I think it was a good time for me to do something else. I saw the rise of digital set-top boxes like from Sky and Virgin. And it was obvious to me that this was a computer: a basic computer but there was a microprocessor, RAM and ROM. And so I said, maybe we can divert the use of it, which was to display an electronic programme guide and video, to do something else. So I developed the idea of developing software for these digital set-top boxes.

Did it reignite your excitement?
Yes. Visiware grew pretty fast and we deployed in 70 countries, with the most popular service being for games. We developed 200 to 300 games and we had a subscription service that cost the equivalent of £5 to play games on your TV. Every week we were providing about 20 to 50 games which were distributed either by satellite or cable to the set-top box and all that was needed to play was a remote. I spent so many hours and days on a plane jetting around the world. But then the market began to reach a plateau because the TV operators couldn't agree on a common middleware. It was a totally disorganised market where you had different middleware and different set-top boxes. So if you wanted to develop an application or a game, you had to make about 40 or 50 versions and it became a nightmare and that's a shame because this business could have grown much bigger and it probably wouldn't be in the hands of Google today.

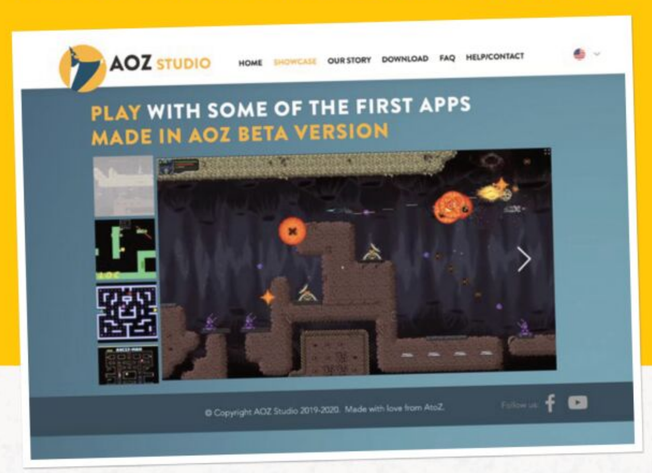
When you created Visiware, did you take on board what you'd learned at Loriciel?
Good question. I learned that 'Laurant, you will never do a physical product again, you will only do virtual goods'. What became a nightmare at Loriciel was

RECAPTURING THE OLD MAGIC

According to Laurant, something went wrong after the initial flurry of 8-bit home computer releases. "Steve Jobs was a big part of it," he reflects, referring to how the 'ready' prompt vanished in favour of graphical user interfaces. "I think the worst was the Amiga which wouldn't let you do anything until you put a disc in the drive. Computers began to be truly complex machines and they became more difficult to program."

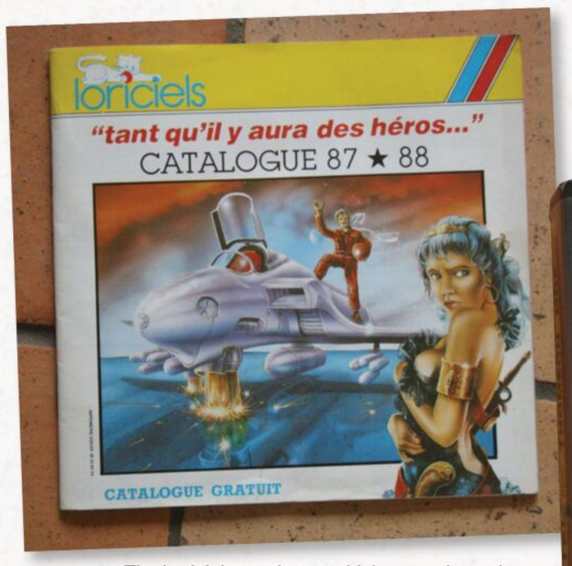
As a consequence, he believes people began to lose their motivation to code. "Children in the Eighties would load a cassette, then reload it because it didn't work, then reload it again because they were patient and they wanted to see what their computers would do," he says. "They'd also type 200 lines of code and, when the computer crashed, they'd spent ages trying to figure out why. That's not a comfortable experience for the mass market today which is why we're taking a different approach with AOZ Studio."

In the absence of the type of computer clubs which flourished in the early years, AOZ Studio looks to be more user-friendly. Laurant needs to find a way to motivate people to launch the app, let alone use it. "But part of my mission is to make the kids a little less stupid and open the way to discovery. If it's anywhere near as successful as its natural predecessor AMOS, we will be very happy."



> "AOZ Studio is taking me back to the beginning, to that lucky time when computers were super easy to program"
> Laurant Weill

» [Amstrad CPC] Dive deep with *Maracaïbo* on the CPC which, as players have pointed out, uses the default blue-yellow colour scheme seen when you turn the computer on.



» The Loriciels catalogue which was released at the end of 1987 and covered the winter releases.

» Loritel software for the French Minitel service which allowed the Thomson MO5, in this case, to be used as a second screen.

» The West Phaser lightgun – released only in France – was rather realistic-looking since it was based on a revolver.

» [Amstrad CPC] *Atomic Driver* was exclusive to the Amstrad CPC and made good use of the computer's 16-colour Mode 0.

» [Amstrad CPC] The adventure game, *Invitation*, was developed for the CPC in 1987 but it was never given an English translation.

the stock, the fact that you'd have to send a certain number of copies of a game to a shop and maybe they'll sell them or maybe they'll get returned. And when they are the big chains, you can't do anything about those returns. You have to accept it. So you'd have all these people in a warehouse with lots of stock and money just sitting there in the games. To me, it was a nightmare so rule number one was never to make a business that needs a warehouse.

And what was rule number two?

Creating a game requires an extremely high investment so it's difficult to start from zero. For a triple-A title, you're going to need to invest £50 to £100 million. So my second lesson was to target casual gaming. There was room for casual games then, and there still is. Casual gaming is a really nice market where you can succeed with good ideas and have a chance to make something without needing a huge amount of money. This has since been proven on smartphones. I found the right platform for this in interactive TV and it also fit my enjoyment of starting businesses where everything is still to be invented.

Is this the case with your latest venture, AOZ Studio?

AOZ Studio is taking me back to the beginning, to that lucky time when computers were super easy to program. So yes, we've created a programming language called AOZ BASIC which is a continuation of AMOS and STOS for the Amiga and Atari ST and it's being developed by François Lionet who wrote those BASIC languages back in the late Eighties and Nineties. It's exciting for me because I wanted to be involved with something that would give people the same chance that I had to program; something that makes it easy to develop games and apps. We're giving people an enhanced language to work with that's not weird or a dead end. People will be able to write in AOZ BASIC and have it converted in fast HTML5/Javascript for use on any platform.

What do you hope will come of it?

Well, we're hoping kids will find it super easy to learn. With one instruction – only one line – you can have a sprite move or have it follow your joystick or mouse and that requires 200 lines in Javascript. Yes, you can learn Python or JavaScript or C and then publish but you'll need to learn how to install a server and install the DNS. With AOZ, there is a publish button. You press it and that's it. We do the job for you and your newly developed game sits on a server and you can share it with friends. It's exciting. It goes beyond Scratch which many people start with, just to learn the logic. We're getting users hands-on and, just as AMOS and STOS led to lots of games for the Amiga and Atari ST, we think this will ignite a passion for coding and lead a new generation to great programming coding. It's exciting and, for me, it's coming full circle. ✱

AOZ Studio is available for Windows, Linux, PC and Mac as a free Beta version at aoz.studio

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Readers can get involved at www.retrogamer.net/forum

IVARF: Did Loriciel make any GX4000 games that ended up being cancelled?

We did three or four cartridges for the console but I don't remember having begun any GX4000 games that didn't get released. I remember that we had to buy an emulator, a hardware device that you had to plug in to program it. And I remember at the time there were a few hardware manufacturers that were coming to us as one of the main publishers because they needed software to launch the machine. Sometimes we would get paid in advance – I suspect that wasn't the case with Amstrad though!

MR JENZIE: You had two tennis games in 1993: *Davis Cup Tennis* for the Mega Drive and *International Tennis Tour* on the SNES. Why did you name them differently?

We also had one that did very well on the TurboGrafx console. This was purely a licensing decision. We sold the rights to the Davis Cup licence to NEC because they felt it was strong in the US and Japan. So this was pure marketing from the licensee.

IVARF: Loriciel released *Rally II* for the Amstrad CPC in 1985 which was a fast, good-looking car game with big sprites. What were your thoughts when US Gold released *Out Run* for the Amstrad CPC?

In the videogame business, there is competition every day. It's all about the way you move on, looking at what others are creating. We had a good relationship with US Gold. We worked on *Skweek* which we licensed to US Gold. I don't think I met anyone who got furious or unhappy by a competitor launching a game that looked like another. Most of the companies were already copying existing games at that time – there were many different copies of *Q*bert* and *Space Invaders*. It would have been strange to have been angry, that's for sure.

89

Luigi's Mansion

BUSTIN' MAKES ME FEEL GOOD

» GAMECUBE » 2001 » NINTENDO EAD

I still recall buying my GameCube. I decided to buy one the day before launch after watching someone on *Cube* play *Luigi's Mansion*. Amazingly, I was not only able to secure a machine, but I somehow managed to be the second in the queue for the console's midnight launch that very evening. It was exciting until I realised that the queue just made us a pliable audience.

I got home shortly before 1.00am and I immediately booted up *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader*, because let's face it, of course I was going to. After all, sleep is for suckers where new consoles are concerned. After about ten minutes I put on *Luigi's Mansion*… and promptly fell asleep. I woke up around 5.00am and the game was still running, so I did what any sensible person would do who fell asleep in their clothes: I made a cup of coffee and started playing it.

Despite my general tiredness there was no denying just how good *Luigi's Mansion* was. When I was a kid I wanted to be a dinosaur hunter (I was very young at the time) while my other dream job was to be a Ghostbuster (again, very young). For me, Nintendo's game managed to fulfil that ambition in a way that even the official *Ghostbusters* games couldn't manage. What I love about *Luigi's Mansion* is that the build-up to a battle is just as good as the eventual skirmish. You wander around the creepy mansion, trying each locked door and hoping to find the key that will allow you to open up a new area and continue your search for Mario. It's very atmospheric.

While early ghosts are relatively easy to catch, later ones are more difficult and you'll need to use environmental clues or fast reflexes in order to engage with them. Even if you do manage to lock onto a ghost the battle has only just begun as you'll need to counteract the ghost's frantic movements so that you can hoover it up with your Poltergust 3000. Mechanically it's a tremendously satisfying game and it's boosted by some excellent boss battles, particularly a tense showdown with a dangerous ghostly baby early on in the game.

Rogue Leader may have been the GameCube game that blew me away, but *Luigi's Mansion* was the one I fell in love with. I still own it to this very day. ✱

>> This month we take a look at SNK's new compilation, play the latest Quarter Arcades cabinet, discover a new Boulder Dash game and find out if Blizzard Arcade Collection is worth picking up

»[Switch] Titles like *The Match Of The Millennium* sell for over £100, making SNK's compilation good value for money.

Neo Geo Pocket Color Selection Vol 1

SNK'S LATEST COMPILATION CELEBRATES ITS PORTABLE WONDER

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED** SWITCH
- **ALSO ON:** NA
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £34.99
- **PUBLISHER:** SNK
- **DEVELOPER:** CODE MYSTICS
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

If you've been dutifully picking up Code Mystics' rather impressive Neo Geo Pocket Color conversions, this new compilation may sting. All six previously released games now feature on a single compilation with four additional exclusive titles: *Metal Slug 1st Mission*, *Metal Slug 2nd Mission*, *Big Tournament Golf* and *Dark Arms: Beast Buster 1999*. While this is great news for new adopters, it may leave a bad taste for those who have bought the earlier releases, particularly as the four new titles aren't currently available separately.

If you've yet to discover the joys of SNK's console on Switch, this compilation is an excellent place to start, as it's a great overview of the console's small, but impressive library of games. In terms of presentation this is very nice. All ten cartridges are displayed on-screen, with the bottom half of the screen highlighting whatever game you have selected. You can switch between English and Japanese versions (the displayed cart also changes region) and it's also possible to see scans of the original manuals. These are a really nice inclusion and again, both English and Japanese manuals are included.

Another nice addition which is currently unique to this compilation is the ability to look at a 3D model of the original box and view it from any angle. You can even open it up to view the cart inside and both English and Japanese versions are available. The clamshell design packaging was a big part of the appeal of the original games, so it's nice to see it replicated here. The final option on the main menu is the ability to switch between different versions of the console including colour, new colour and black and white. It's worth noting though that switching between the colour and black and white models resets your suspended play progress and that only six games are supported when using the black and white option.

When it comes to the emulation Code Mystics has done a great job. After hammering all ten games they all appear to look and sound exactly how they did on the original hardware and

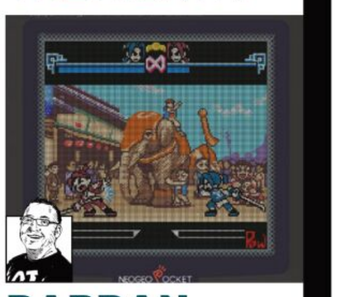
»[Switch] The dot-matrix effect looks superb and is particularly pleasing on the eye when viewed on the big screen.

BRIEF HISTORY

» The Neo Geo Pocket was released in October 1998, a week after Nintendo released the Game Boy Color. A new colour model was introduced five months later in March 1999 and was supported by just over 80 games. The system is now highly desirable as a collectors item with titles like *The Match Of The Millennium*, *Faselei!*, *Sonic The Hedgehog* and *Gals' Fighters* fetching hundreds of pounds in mint condition.

»[Switch] Sadly, all fighters suffer in the control department as Nintendo's Joycon is no substitute for the Pocket's excellent joystick.

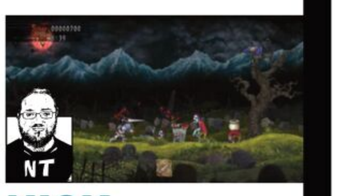
✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Neo Geo Pocket Color Selection Vol 1

I've been rinsing this over the last few weeks. Great emulation, decent extras and a solid collection of games.



NICK

Ghosts 'N Goblins Resurrection

It looks so good and it hurts so bad. Videogame masochism is rarely so pure.

»[Switch] It's a shame you can't eradicate the slowdown on the *Slug* games but at least they feel authentic.

POCKET POWER

THE FULL LIST OF GAMES

- BIG TOURNAMENT GOLF
- DARK ARMS: BEAST BUSTER 1999
- FATAL FURY FIRST CONTACT
- GALS' FIGHTERS
- KING OF FIGHTERS R-2
- THE LAST BLADE: BEYOND THE DESTINY
- METAL SLUG 1ST MISSION
- METAL SLUG 2ND MISSION
- SAMURAI SHODOWN! 2
- SNK VS CAPCOM: THE MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM

»[Switch] Japanese and English manuals exist for each game and both are worth browsing as they often contain exclusive artwork.

»[Switch] You can have different colour skins depending on which core model you selected: colour, new colour or black and white.

»[Switch] The rewind option is useful, but we'd like it to last a little longer than it does.

we didn't notice any weird graphical glitches or sound dropouts. The games admittedly do look a little weird running at 30 fps on a big TV screen, but it's not their fault and the lower frame rate is less noticeable when you're playing in handheld mode. In fact the emulation is too perfect at times as the slowdown in games like *Metal Slug 2nd Mission* is still apparent. All in all, we're really impressed.

The available display options are interesting. You can choose to switch between different skins of whichever model of Pocket you've chosen but this is at the expense of screen real estate. Fortunately you can zoom right in with no loss of pixel clarity in this mode. The only filter option on offer is the ability to emulate the Pocket's dot-matrix display and it's a very good effect and looks particularly nice on the big screen. The standard screen option is equally good, ensuring pixels always look nice and crisp.

Some quality of life enhancements exist for the compilation as well in the form of customisable controls and a rewind function. Being able to change buttons is handy as the Pocket and Switch control layouts are reversed which is quite confusing when you first start playing. The rewind option is another good idea, although you're not able to reverse back very far, meaning it's much more useful on certain games than others.

So that just leaves the games themselves and they're a good representation of SNK's portable darling. Out of the four new games the two *Metal Slug* titles are the obvious highlights. Slowdown aside, both have aged exceptionally well and are packed with variety, particularly the second game, which refines most of the mechanics found in *1st Mission*. *Big Tournament Golf* is another excellent game with a variety of gameplay modes and tight, precise shot mechanics. That leaves *Dark Arms*, a weird shooter with RPG-lite elements that's certainly interesting, but is unlikely to grab your attention like the other three titles. As we've already mentioned, the remaining six games are all available separately for £7.19 and represent perhaps the best fighting games on the system. *Gals' Fighters* is a lovely brawler that focuses on SNK's many heroines, *Fatal Fury First Contact* is a little light on extras but boasts solid fighting mechanics, while *King Of Fighters R-2* offers both single and tag team play, as well as a customisable mode called Making. *Samurai Shodown! 2* and *The Last Blade: Beyond The Destiny* are weapon-based battlers, while *SNK Vs Capcom: The Match Of The Millennium* is a truly tremendous crossover and arguably one of the best portable fighters of all time on any system. The Dreamcast link up options on certain games are obviously no longer available, but all multiplayer games support local play off a single Switch, which is a very nice touch.

Neo Geo Pocket Color Selection Vol 1 is a solid compilation with great emulation but sparse extras. It's an easy recommendation, unless of course you've been picking up the games separately. If that's the case you may want to wait and see if the four exclusives are eventually made available individually. ✱

In a nutshell

A fantastic selection of Pocket Color games with decent extras and a good price. It acts as a brilliant introduction to SNK's marvellous console.

>> Score **80%**

★ PICK OF THE MONTH

Quarter Arcades: Bubble Bobble

» **Buy it from:** numskull.com, retail » **Buy it for:** £149.99

Numskull's latest game in its Quarter Arcades range is a rather significant one, as it marks the first time the company has released a dual joystick cabinet. The upside of this is that you can enjoy Taito's fantastic game exactly how it was intended, the downside is that things get a little cramped as there's not really much space for two sets of adult hands. Still, jostling for position in front of your local cab was part and parcel of the experience back in the day, so it is pretty accurate in that respect.

Purists may be a little upset at *Bubble Bobble*'s cab design because it's not quite as authentic as past efforts. This does makes sense though as having the joysticks in their original positions would have made the playing space even more cramped, so we think the team has made the right choice. It also looks lovely with a gorgeous light-up marquee and a stunning bevel. The side-art is a little bland compared to previous cabs, but that's our only real issue with how it looks.

Design wise it's as solid as you'd expect from the Quarter Arcades range. The build of it feels excellent and the screen feels of similar quality to past cabs, with the same viewing angle issues if you're not looking at it directly. The emulation is great too, although we did notice some shimmering when you move to a new level and the sound did drop out on one occasion. High scores are saved even when the machine is powered off and you can also alter things like difficulty, lives and when you receive a bonus life. *Bubble Bobble* is a tremendously good game and it's brilliant to see it added to the Quarter Arcades range, even if it does get a little crowded when playing with a friend.

»The design of the cabinet looks fantastic.

»The position of the joysticks has changed to better cater for two players.

Blizzard Arcade Collection

» **System:** Switch (tested), PC, PS4, Xbox One
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £16.99

Just three games feature on this curated collection: *Blackthorne, The Lost Vikings* and *Rock N' Roll Racing*. It feels a little stingy, but different versions of each game are included, and as they all feature extras like additional tracks and levels they're worth playing as separate entries. All three games are suitably different as well. *Blackthorne* mimics the cinematic style of classics like *Flashback*, *The Lost Vikings* combines the platform and puzzle genres to great effect, while *Rock N' Roll Racing* is still a blast thanks to that great soundtrack and solid combat mechanics. Add in the usual save options and display filters and Blizzard's collection may well surprise you.

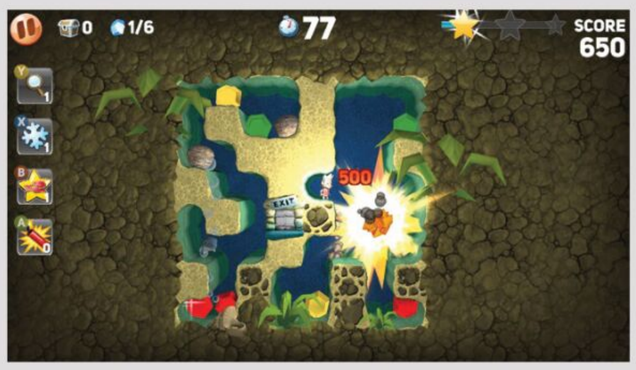
» Score **70%**

Ghosts 'N Goblins Resurrection

» **System:** Switch » **Buy it from:** Online
» **Buy it for:** £24.99

Capcom's famously tough platformer has risen from the grave yet again, looking better than ever with some gorgeous 2D visuals and wonderful musical themes. The game also offers co-op play, a range of difficulty levels with some genuinely helpful features, and for the first couple of stages, a choice of stages to tackle. Favourite bosses return, often in inventive fashion. Unfortunately, unlike in *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* for example, making progress often feels like a real slog – almost as if the developers have decided that they can be as sadistic as possible, now that the player has unlimited lives. The line between fun and frustration is a fine one, and this falls on the wrong side too often.

» Score **71%**



Boulder Dash Deluxe

» **System:** PC (tested), Mac » **Buy it from:** Online
» **Buy it for:** £13.99

Rockford returns in the latest version of this venerable action-puzzle series, and it's a comeback that we'll welcome. While *Boulder Dash Deluxe* definitely has a certain budget game look about it, the graphics are functional and don't get in the way of enjoying the gameplay. There's a lot of game here too, as the game features 180 new stages, along with 20 from the original *Boulder Dash*. Everything moves along at a good pace and the game does a good job of explaining new enemies as you encounter them. Some power-ups like time freezes and dynamite can help you out of tricky situations too. It's a solid package that will appeal to veterans and newcomers alike.

» Score **80%**

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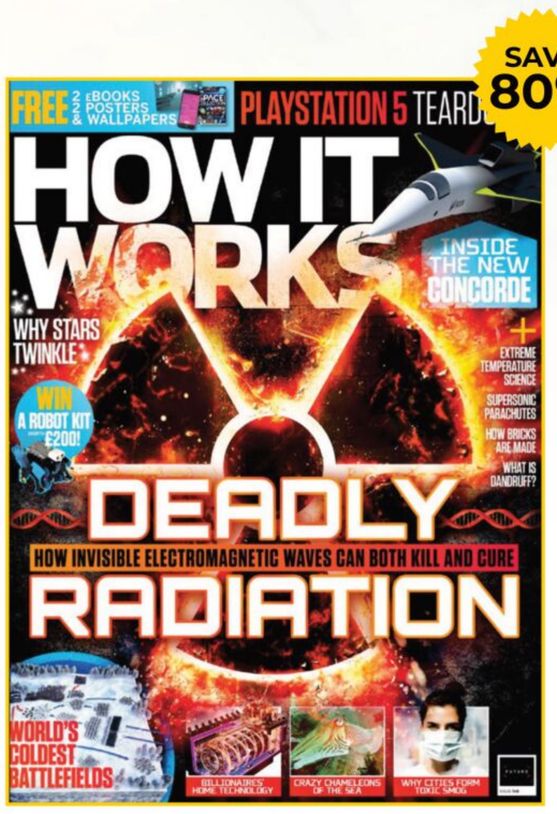

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HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

VIDEOGAME MOVIES

The team asks: are movies based on games any good?

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

This month's topic comes courtesy of our designer Andy, who noted that with *Ghostbusters II* and *Mortal Kombat* in the issue, the connection between videogames and movies would be a rather interesting area to explore. With that in mind, we decided to discuss the often bungled art of cinematic videogame adaptations.

NICK
What was the last videogame movie you saw, and what did you think of it?

DARRAN
The last one I saw was *Detective Pikachu*. I thought it was largely forgettable nonsense but my kids enjoyed it.

NICK
Detective Pikachu was the last one I saw too, I was actually rewatching it, with my family who were seeing it for the first time. It's got so many cool moments for fans, but the story really stops making sense in the final act. Still, that makes it better than most videogame movies.

TIM
I saw *Monster Hunter*. I was kind of looking forward to it because I wanted it to be great. But it's not and now I'm cross.

NICK
What was it about *Monster Hunter* that you didn't like? I've not seen that one.

TIM
There's not enough space here to really get into it, but meh. There's only really two monsters (and a quick cameo at the end). But worst of all there's no flipping switch-axe! Stupid film.

NICK
So it wasn't particularly authentic, then? I feel like that happens a lot, and it's one of the big problems with videogame adaptations.

DARRAN
Agreed. Look at all that nonsense about the *Uncharted* film when its director said it was about a family of antique dealers. You what mate?

NICK
So which videogame movies would you guys actually hold up as being relatively good?

TIM
Umm… yeah *Sonic* was alright.

DARRAN
I actually think the first *Mortal Kombat* is pretty decent. That's largely because they rip off *Enter The Dragon* though.

NICK
I enjoyed both of those. The *Yakuza* movie that was released in Japan was another one I enjoyed, though it's mainly carried by a single character, Goro Majima.

DARRAN
I do think the first *Silent Hill* movie is pretty good as well. The atmosphere in it is terrific and it actually has acting in it which I'd say is passable, which is quite a big plus in those sorts of films.

TIM
I did not know the *Yakuza* one existed. And I thought I'd seen all the videogame films. Even that animated *Tekken* one. And the live-action *Tekken* one. Urgh, I've also seen *The King Of Fighters* film.

DARRAN
Where does everyone stand on *Super Mario Bros*? I'm hearing more and more suggestions that it's nowhere near as bad as many say, but I watched it about a year ago and it's still utter trash that largely takes a big dump on the game's lore.

» *Sonic The Hedgehog* was a lot better than the original trailer suggested it would be, to Nick's eternal relief.

» *Street Fighter* isn't a great film, but Raul Julia's wildly over-the-top performance at least makes it amusing.

NICK
Oh boy, *Super Mario Bros*. I first saw it about eight or nine years ago at a bad film club I used to go to, and it was so bad that it went beyond amusing and straight back to awful. I spent most of the film drinking in the hope that I'd remember less of it.

TIM
I haven't seen *Super Mario Bros* in a long time, and I'd like to keep it that way, thanks.

NICK
That's the one thing *Sonic* fans will always have over *Mario* fans – at least *our* film was decent.

DARRAN
Which is about the only time they can say that in relation to *Mario*, lol. Why have we not mentioned Uwe Boll yet? He's made some terrible films about videogames and keeps making them.

TIM
Because he'll want to fight you.

NICK
Oh yeah, he did that boxing thing with his critics, didn't he?

TIM
Yup.

DARRAN
That's an impressive stance to take. He won the few fights that did happen I recall.

NICK
As far as I recall, he actually has experience as an amateur boxer. But man, those films. I can't understand the decision to just randomly cut game footage into *House Of The Dead*.

DARRAN
What I find particularly impressive with his films is who he is able to attract. He gets big names at times.

NICK
Yeah, I was just looking and he

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» True horror is realising that Nick didn't include straight to DVD releases or TV series in this photo of his collection of videogame adaptations.

got Jason Statham as a star for *Dungeon Siege*. That's crazy.

DARRAN
Let's quickly talk about The Rock. He likes his videogames clearly. Or he is savvy enough to know their appeal. I was pleasantly surprised by just how much fun *Rampage* was. It did a better job than the recent *Godzilla* and *King Kong* movies I thought. What about you, Tim?

TIM
I've seen it, thought it was bollocks. Looked nothing like what I played on the C64.

NICK
That's a funny thing, few films ever try to achieve the look of the games – though there was that first-person bit in *Doom*, which The Rock was also in.

DARRAN
Good sequence that. Also I can't believe we've hardly mentioned *Sonic*. This must be killing Nick.

NICK
If anything was going to kill me, it was going to be that first trailer. They did a top-class rescue job on that film, for sure.

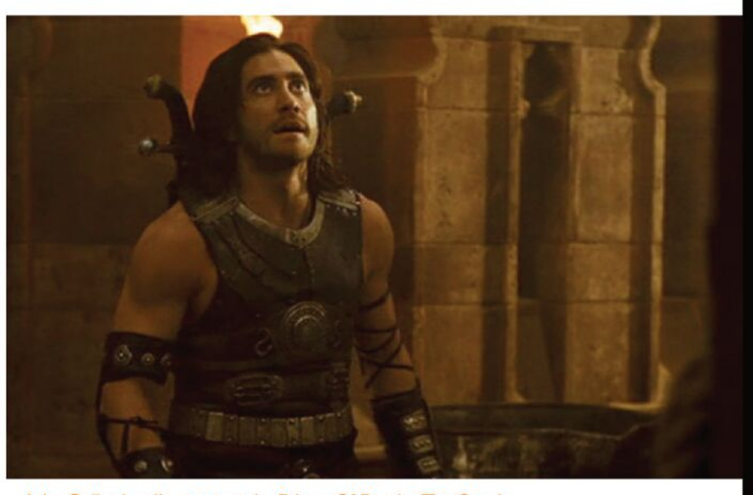
DARRAN
Maybe I should give it a go. I do like Jim Carrey being Jim Carrey.

TIM
He is the Eggman.

DARRAN
So the big takeaway from this is if you have to watch a videogame movie it's best not to bother. You'll only end up disappointed.

TIM
Assassin's Creed, *Prince Of Persia*, *Tomb Raider* and so on… yes, disappointment all round.

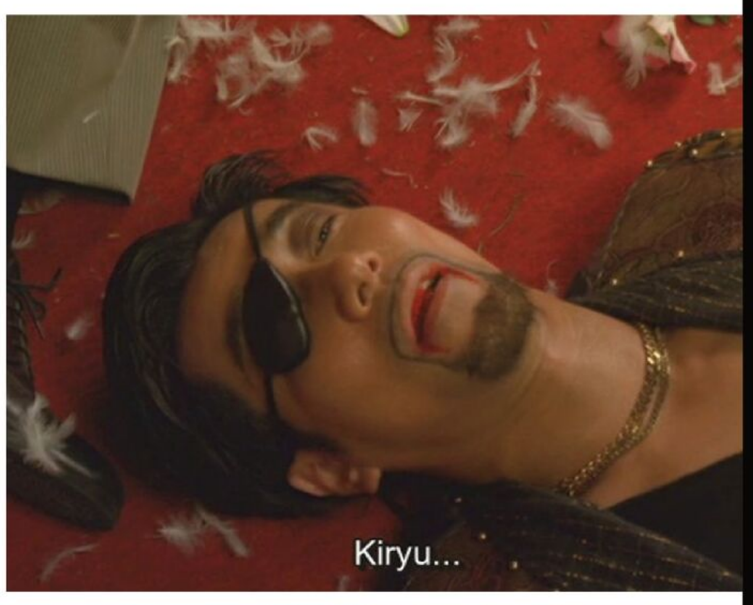
NICK
Maybe, but between *Sonic* and *Detective Pikachu* I think they're definitely improving. Just, y'know, keep Uwe Boll away from your projects, Hollywood. ✱



» Jake Gyllenhaal's star turn in *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* was the highest grossing videogame movie until the 2016 release of *Warcraft*.

» Tim describes *Street Fighter II: The Animated Movie* as "the only videogame film I've actually enjoyed".

» *Dead Or Alive* felt bizarrely out of time – like a Nineties film that had somehow been shelved until 2006.



» Takashi Miike has done a couple of decent videogame movies for the Japanese market, including *Ace Attorney* and *Yakuza: Like A Dragon*.

READERS REACT

What are your favourite movies based on games?

Mark Lago
I grew up on the Nintendo side of the Nineties console wars, so there was a part of me that was loathe to take my eight-year-old daughter to see the *Sonic* movie last year. Even my inner Mario had to admit that the *Sonic* movie was tremendously fun and well made. Now, if my daughter would stop saying she likes Sonic more than Mario…

Ben Wilson
The *Mortal Kombat* movie was far better than it had any right to be. *Silent Hill* was decent too, if a little lacking in actual horror elements (other than Pyramid Head and that guy's skin). Also, *Dead Or Alive* was… eesh. It says something when Kevin Nash was the highlight.

Clive Barker
Growing up playing *Street Fighter II*, I was really excited to see the live action film (especially with Kylie Minogue). When I first saw it, I wondered why they had ruined my favourite game but watching it now, I see it for what it is, a Hollywood adaptation throwing in lots of popular stars.

ACO
Pokémon: Detective Pikachu – it's hard to ignore Ryan Reynolds' charm. But above all, Rob Letterman knew his *Pokémon*, and made it work in live action.

Graham Plowman
Prince Of Persia for me. I found it was just generally enjoyable as a movie even ignoring the game connection. A fun romp!

Dr Goggles
I actually like the *Resident Evil* films, but the quality drops off as the series progresses. The first one is a great film!

Fiachra Delea
I remember watching *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* in the cinema and being blown away by how good the animation was. Haven't watched it in years though so no idea how well it holds up.

BiffaTheKnight
I didn't mind the *Silent Hill* movie. Some genuinely well done bits. Plus it's got Sean Bean in it, just like *GoldenEye 007*.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

SONIC & KNUCKLES CUSTOM CONSOLE

"I commissioned this custom *Sonic & Knuckles* console to celebrate my love for the game. RAW Talent has done a wonderful job bringing my dreams alive."

PAID: A LOT!

KNUCKLES CHAOTIX

"I bought this back in the Nineties before I even had a 32X. Knuckles is my favourite character and I wish Sega would make another game starring my beloved echidna."

PAID: £5

BIO

NAME:
Faith Johnson

LOCATION:
London, UK

FAVOURITE GAME:
Sonic 3 & Knuckles

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Dreamcast

COLLECTION WORTH:
£30k

TWITTER:
@retrofaith1

SONIC 2 IN 1

"Probably the rarest *Sonic* title I own. This was the last piece I needed to finish my Game Gear set. I was kindly given this at a very special price so not telling!"

PAID: SECRET

HEDGEHOG SANCTUARY

Scouring the world to build a massive Sonic collection

This month's collector may be familiar to you, as she's very active in the retro gaming community. Chances are you'll have come across Retro Faith via her social media activity or YouTube channel, where she posts reviews, retrospectives and more. She's also a big game collector, having been going for decades at this point. "I have always kept my games since I was a kid but if I had to put a date on actual collecting it would be late 2000 when I got my first job," she explains. "I could suddenly buy up all the stuff in the charity shops that nobody seemed to want any more, how things change."

Though she has a complete collection of PAL Dreamcast games, Faith prefers to collect by series and theme, and her biggest collection by far is *Sonic The Hedgehog* games – a habit that started from a young age. "In a nutshell I was hooked from day one in 1991. Every Christmas and birthday I would ask for *Sonic* games or items." Though it would eventually be dethroned in Faith's heart, she still remembers that initial appeal. "Originally it was Sonic's speed and the curves of the original game, it was so new at the time. I loved the music and unique boss battles as well. But as the series grew, Knuckles became my favourite. I really empathise with his anger at the world that relates to my own personal life, he is also tough and dedicated to his cause that I find an admirable quality in a character. And lastly, he just looks so cool with his dreadlocks and huge fighting fists!"

This passion for the series inspired Faith towards collecting not only *Sonic* games, but their regional variations. "As soon as I got my first job, and eBay was just starting, I made a decision to collect one of every *Sonic* game from UK, USA and Japan for Sega's consoles. Since then it has grown into a worldwide effort. I have discovered many variants over the years and I get daily emails from collectors asking about artwork, manual and cart differences. I have put my life into charting the history of *Sonic* games and think of it as more a museum than a collection." That's no overstatement, as it's an expansive collection. "I have 383 different games and about 130 other items ranging from posters to figures and other collectibles."

If you're looking to build a similarly impressive collection, Faith has some advice. "Have specific goals, know exactly what you are after before starting. This will help you keep focused and know how much you will need to spend," she says. "Research, research, research. Find as much information about the sets, consoles and peripherals you are going for as it will help you pay the right price," she adds. "Make friends in the community, building a good network of fellow collectors and sellers will spread your search net wider."

As for her collecting philosophy, Faith values patience. "I am a bit of a cheapskate so will happily wait for bargains on common items, but there is always the odd item that you know will not appear again for a long time so you must be ready. I do have my limits but I keep a special *Sonic* fund put aside for the rare occasions a real collecting grail pops up for sale." What might inspire a dip into that fund? "The one item I am desperate to get is a *Knuckles Chaotix* 32X console bundle, it has eluded me for 25 years now," Faith tells us.

If you feel like keeping tabs on whether she finds the elusive bundle or not, you can look out for Retro Faith on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. ✱

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

ASCII FT SKELETON CONTROLLER

"The crown jewel of my Dreamcast collection. Only 1,000 made and given away in a prize draw through Dreamcast Direct. This one is brand-new and I was lucky a friend in Japan found it for me."

PAID: £100

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

SONIC & KNUCKLES NTSC-J

"This is my favourite artwork for any videogame. The simple, bold colours and that iconic logo just scream Sega to me. It was this game that cemented my passion for Sonic Team and Sega."

PAID: £20

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

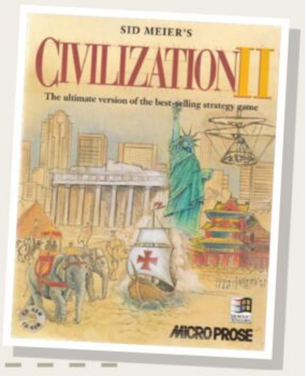
THE COVER STAR

GUNSTAR HEROES

If you've not looked for a while, you might be surprised that a complete PAL copy of our cover star *Gunstar Heroes* now goes for **£100+.** Consider the *Classic Collection* instead – it includes *Gunstar Heroes*, goes for **£20+** and has no region lock. Alternatively, other regions are cheaper, with American copies selling for **£85** and up, and Japanese copies starting from **£70.** The Japan-only *Gunstar Heroes Treasure Box* for PS2 starts at about **£40.** The Game Gear version is **£85+.**

SPEED FREAKS

Funcom's PlayStation kart racer isn't tremendously expensive – it can be had for **£10** or less, and we've seen it for as little as **£1.50** before postage. There's no significant price difference between first run copies and budget copies with the yellow Value Series strip on the cover. *Speed Punks*, the North American release, is a little more expensive at **£10-15.**

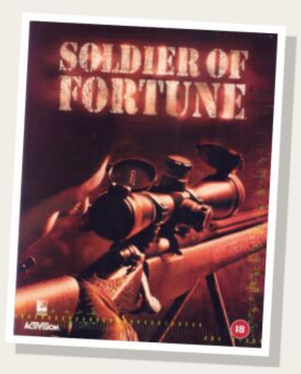


CIVILIZATION II

Pricing for the PC version of this strategy classic is all over the place – big box copies can go for anything from **£2-15** in complete condition. A PlayStation copy complete with the tech tree poster typically goes for **£5-8,** but we've seen it as low as **£2.20.** Big box Mac copies tend to fetch **£15-20,** but are most common in North America.

SILKWORM

This shooter's on a lot of platforms, and prices vary wildly. The Amiga and Atari ST versions both start at around **£10,** but a complete NES copy will set you back **£50** or more. The Commodore 64 version is very cheap, starting at **£1,** the Spectrum version starts a little higher at **£2,** and the Amstrad CPC game goes for around **£4.**



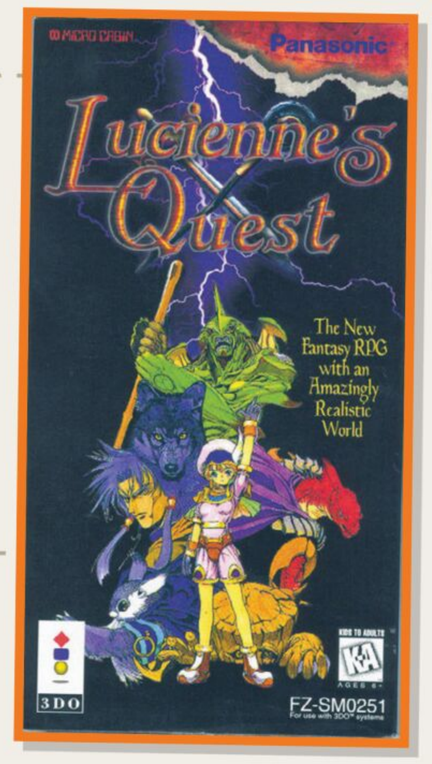
SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

If you fancy some grisly FPS action, it won't cost you too much. Physical copies of the PC version start at just **£2,** though the big box version will set you back **£10** or more. The Dreamcast version will set you back **£5** or more, ranging up to **£20,** and the PlayStation 2 version starts from as little as **£1.**

HOW MUCH?!

LUCIENNE'S QUEST

This 3DO RPG is renowned for its rarity, but one North American copy recently sold for a whopping **$1,288** in Canadian dollars – or about **£742.** What makes this so crazy is that one had sold a month prior for just **€301 (£258).** While the large cardboard box of the higher-priced copy was definitely in a better condition, both were complete and the difference wasn't a huge one as neither copy was exactly mint. The cardboard collector's tax strikes again, it seems.



Prices correct at time of print

RELIVING THE DREAM

Playing dial-up Dreamcast games in a broadband age

The arrival of the Dreamcast in my home was a monumental occasion, and only partially because of the games. You can probably imagine just how excited I was to finally get my hands on *Sonic Adventure*, but a large reason for the excitement was that I finally had a way to get online at home. Prior to that, I could get online once a week at the local library, provided I'd been quick enough to book the slot. Now, I could read about Sonic and wrestling in the comfort of my bedroom – so long as I ran the telephone cable up the stairs in a fairly hazardous way, when mum gave permission and didn't want to make any calls. Of course, I inevitably dipped my toes in the waters of online gaming too, which resulted in the kind of phone bills that convinced my mum to become an early broadband adopter in 2002.

These days, the idea of browsing the internet on a Dreamcast is less than thrilling – most websites simply don't work well with the very old browser software. The online games are a different matter though, as games like *Chu Chu Rocket*, *Alien Front Online* and *Ooga Booga* are good fun and just aren't available elsewhere. But since most official Dreamcast game servers closed down in 2003, and dial-up internet still attracts call charges in the UK, you'd expect this to be a dead end. But thanks to a nifty bit of software called DreamPi, any Raspberry Pi owner can hook a Dreamcast up to use their home broadband connection, with compatible games automatically re-routed towards community-hosted servers. I've been aware of it for a while now, but only recently took the plunge and tried it for myself.

The main reason for the wait was that I needed to buy a couple of additional pieces of equipment. I already had the Dreamcast and Raspberry Pi, but I needed to get a USB 56k modem for the Raspberry Pi and a line voltage inducer. This supplies power across the telephone cable connection and you can build or buy one, but since most DIY designs use batteries and the PAL system requires two 9V batteries, I bought one that draws its power over USB. Once I had those, I was able to connect everything up very easily and use the DreamKey 3.0 browser to complete the set-up – I couldn't have used an earlier version, as those ones don't allow you to input your own ISP details.

Getting online with your Dreamcast is certainly a nostalgic experience. The excruciatingly slow loading of images will take you right back, before quickly returning to annoying you as much as it used to, while the connection timer in the corner of the screen seems quite quaint when you're not being billed by the minute for time spent online. One massive upgrade compared to 20 years ago is the Dreamcast Now website which displays live information on active players, showing what they're currently playing and other recent games they've played. Perhaps predictably, *Phantasy Star Online* tends to dominate the scene for drop-in play, but Dreamcast Live has a list of weekly scheduled game sessions on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday nights with earlier UK sessions on Sunday nights. Games can also be organised via the Dreamcast-Talk forums and Discord server.

Of course, there are rarely many players online outside of arranged meeting times, but that doesn't mean you can't have fun. Since the Dreamcast's online capabilities were pretty humble, plenty of games focused on online services like DLC and leaderboards rather than direct competition, and some of these have been brought back too. In fact, my first port of call was the old *Sonic Adventure* site, which has the old event downloads up for grabs as well as a brand new custom one. I also checked out the *Jet Set Radio* site, which could do with a bit more custom graffiti, and had a quick crack at the *Metropolis Street Racer* speed challenge.

All that is fun of course, but I did still want to enjoy some real multiplayer, and I finally got my first chance when a friendly German player joined me for a *Chu Chu Rocket* session one evening. It was an absolute blast – the game is sufficiently unpredictable that anyone can win, and individual rounds can turn around in seconds. In fact, that's what happened in one round when my poor human opponent was winning by quite a distance, until I slammed two cats into his rocket in the last two seconds and stole the victory. We ended up splitting our four matches evenly, one apiece with the CPU players winning two, and agreed that we'd play some other games together in the future.

I'm really excited about the Dreamcast's online capabilities all over again. One of the distinctive qualities of a favourite system, which I thought had been lost forever, is back – and without the associated phone bills. It's been such a simple process, and so much fun, that I wish I'd jumped in years ago. Still, there's no point lamenting the time I've wasted. I can't wait to get involved more, as I've yet to get back on *Phantasy Star Online* and never tried *Alien Front Online*, and I'm really looking forward to seeing which games the community can revive in the future. Hopefully I'll even see some of you out there in the near future too. ✱

BOOKMARKS

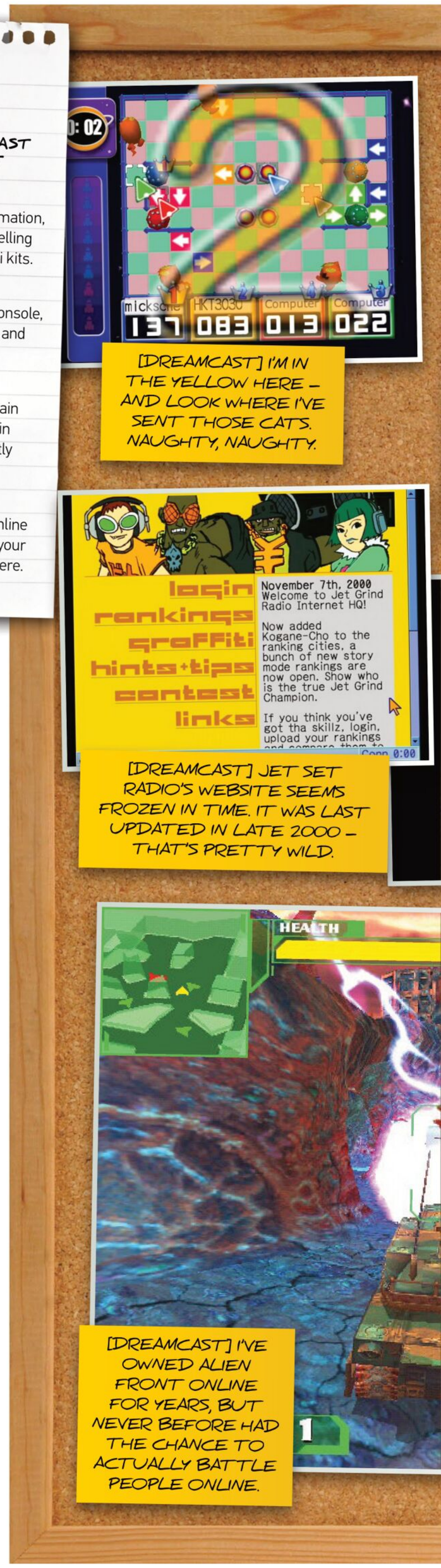
WEBSITES EVERY ONLINE DREAMCAST PLAYER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

DREAMCASTLIVE.NET
Your first stop – this site has news, plenty of information, game schedules, downloads and even a shop selling items like line voltage inducers and full DreamPi kits.

DREAMCAST-TALK.COM
Dreamcast-Talk is a forum all about Sega's final console, with a dedicated section for scheduling games, and helpful members if you get stuck.

DREAMPIPE.NET
You'll need to create a login here to access certain services like leaderboards. It also has a bulletin board and IRC chat that can be accessed directly from your Dreamcast.

DREAMCAST.ONLINE/NOW
This site lets you see which DreamPi users are online and what they're playing. You can also configure your own DreamPi username and avatar for display here.


micksche
HKT3030
Computer
Computer
137
083
013
022
[DREAMCAST] I'M IN THE YELLOW HERE – AND LOOK WHERE I'VE SENT THOSE CATS. NAUGHTY, NAUGHTY.
login
rankings
graffiti
hints+tips
contest
links
November 7th, 2000
Welcome to Jet Grind Radio Internet HQ!
Now added Kogane-Cho to the ranking cities, a bunch of new story mode rankings are now open. Show who is the true Jet Grind Champion.
If you think you've got tha skillz, login, upload your rankings
[DREAMCAST] JET SET RADIO'S WEBSITE SEEMS FROZEN IN TIME. IT WAS LAST UPDATED IN LATE 2000 – THAT'S PRETTY WILD.
HEALTH
[DREAMCAST] I'VE OWNED ALIEN FRONT ONLINE FOR YEARS, BUT NEVER BEFORE HAD THE CHANCE TO ACTUALLY BATTLE PEOPLE ONLINE.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE DREAMCAST ONLINE MEMORIES?

Readers recall their early connected console experiences with us

Martin
I did it once, looked at adult material and never tried it again. Was too terrified at the phone bill and how I would explain it.

George Swain
I remember playing *PSO*, and the absolute shitstorm from my parents when the first month's BT phone bill arrived!

Micheal J Watts
Phantasy Star Online! Agito 1975 from a Pal Rappy as my Pinkal Fonewearl! Never will I ever forget the damn katana that everyone was looking for. That and getting the Partisan Of Lightning... my only two drops that were amazing.

Chris Whitsey
Loved playing *Quake III Arena* online, and if I remember right it had crossplay with PC users, which made it extremely challenging.

RetroSteveUK
Dreamcast was my first experience with the internet, before I had a PC. Other than browsing web pages, my strongest memory was of downloading images to use as in-game graffiti in *Jet Set Radio*. It was all a fascinating novelty back then.

André Verwey
Only used online for downloading *Sonic Adventure* holiday-themed DLC, and did manage to play some *Chu Chu Rocket*. I remember dialling in took some time back in Holland.

[DREAMCAST] THANKFULLY, I WASN'T FULLY RUSTY AND COULD STILL HOLD MY OWN IN A GAME OF CHU CHU ROCKET!
Winner!
HKT3030
Player 1
012
Player 2
048
Player 3
001
Player 4
013
IT'S A SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE SET-UP. POWER AND ETHERNET IN ONE SIDE OF THE RASPBERRY PI, MODEM AND LINE VOLTAGE INDUCER OUT OF THE OTHER AND INTO THE DREAMCAST.
Dreamcast
16-BIT
[DREAMCAST] I'LL INEVITABLY RETURN TO RAGOL AT SOME POINT – PROBABLY THE NEXT TIME I GET A LOT OF FREE TIME.
Battle
1st HUmar
2nd FOnewoarl
3rd RAmar
4th HUcast
dreamcast live
March '21 Giveaway: Treasure Strike (Update: Winner Chosen!)
DREAMCAST LIVE IS A GREAT RESOURCE IF YOU'RE PLANNING TO FOLLOW ME INTO THE WORLD OF RETRO ONLINE GAMING.
[DREAMCAST] I TRIED OUT THE NEW SONIC ADVENTURE DLC – FINDING THE FIVE HIDDEN CHAO IS A HARD TASK.
SPEED CHALLENGE
SAN FRANCISCO
Win a car
SEARCH BY USER NAME :
GO
UP 25
DOWN 25
RANK
NAME
TIME
1 RJAY63 01:03.052
2 Jako 01:10.500
3 DELUXX 01:11.888
[DREAMCAST] WILL I EVER TOP RACING GAME ENTHUSIAST RJAY63? NO, PROBABLY NOT, GIVEN MY LOWLY FIFTH-PLACE TIME.
5 Players Online
DREAMCAST NOW MAKES IT REALLY EASY TO TELL WHO'S ONLINE AND WHAT'S BEING PLAYED – LOTS OF PSO HERE, AS USUAL.
ENEMY
14 CRUSHER
5 REDEYE
8 PARADOX
14 BROKEN
41 KILLS

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books

STAR LETTER

LIFE IN THE PAST LANE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I've been wanting to send an email for a few months now but have kept putting it off. Firstly, am I the only person until now that didn't realise that columnist Iain Lee is actually the same Iain Lee that was in *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*? I assume it's because his column photo looks nothing like him in real life!

Anyway, the reason for the email was his column in issue 212 where he talked about how he was trying to relive his life through videogames and to be honest, this hit home with me as I couldn't quite put my finger on these odd feelings of nostalgia I have and wishing things were like they were 30+ years ago. After reading that article, it was like a lightbulb moment. That is exactly what I've been doing. Could you pass my thanks on to Iain please for a great column. His honesty and openness helped me answer a question in my own head and hopefully others too.

Great magazine, written by an amazing team!
Chris Jowett

Hi Chris, thanks for getting in touch. Iain's column that issue definitely resonated with us too. Normally, we play games regardless of their vintage, but lately we've been playing them *because* of their age and their connection with our past. Nick in particular has been really, really obsessed with the mid-Nineties, particularly the brilliant arcade games of the era and their home conversions.

For a moment, it can be nice to do the things you did when you didn't have adult obligations and worries, particularly if that means revisiting a great gaming decade like the Eighties or Nineties. But as Iain rightly pointed out, you can't really go back, so it's best to seek contentment in the present as well as the past.

» For Iain, it's handheld gaming that provides the connection to the past that he's chasing.

» *Turrican* received a Zero Hero, shown in the top left of its extensive awards display here.

LOGO QUERY

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I have a million questions for you! But I'll keep it to one (on this occasion). I've spent this current lockdown indulging in my library of **Retro Gamer** mags – which has now become retro in its own right! I've been purchasing the mag from WHSmith for many years. And every time I do, I remember 'the good ol' days' of seeing amazing box cover art on display (and I could wax on about this for a while). However, I've been curious recently about certain companies – more accurately their logos, which were included along with actual screenshots. The two in particular are Image Works and Zero Hero. I would be grateful if you could shed some light on these in further issues. Thanks for keeping this alive!
Tosh

Hi Tosh, glad you're enjoying the magazine. Image Works was a publishing label which ran from 1988-1992 and largely concentrated on 16-bit home computers, but also published games on the 8-bit computers and even the Sega Master System. You'd have likely seen the Image Works logo on Bitmap Brothers games and elsewhere. The label ceased to exist when its owner Mirrorsoft collapsed in 1992.

Zero Hero wasn't actually a company, but an award given by *Zero* magazine to games scoring over 90% – similar to a Crash Smash. Games used that logo on the cover to show that they were critically acclaimed. In fact, there could even be a box with both the Image Works and Zero Hero logos, though we've not been able to find one.

ZERO COMPLAINTS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I loved the *Project Zero* article, really well-written, and so pleasing that Robert Zak understood the game so well, its many merits, and its fantastic aesthetics and gameplay mechanics. What a brilliant series, absolutely fascinating and absorbing. The way they designed and deployed ghosts, and the various eerie ways in which they appeared, was horror adventure perfection, totally inspired.

I actually think it deserved to be the cover story, though the PS2 cover was very cool.
Thomas Vanheems

Thanks for the kind words Thomas, we're pleased to hear them and Robert surely will be too. We felt it was worth giving the series the spotlight – Darran's also a fan of *Project Zero*, and even had his Wii modded to play the translation patch for the fourth game.

As for the cover, that's a simple commercial consideration. While *Project Zero* was a great feature and could have made for an interesting looking cover, we couldn't pass up an opportunity to put the most popular console ever on the front of the magazine, especially so close to the 20th anniversary of its UK launch.

» [Xbox] Reader Thomas Vanheems appreciates the spooky shenanigans of the *Project Zero* games.

CONTACT US

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Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

KEYBOARD CAPERS

Howdy gang,

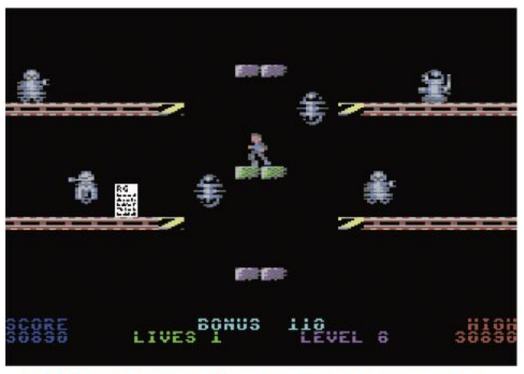
I feel like I've gotten to know you over the past few years, and would like to give you all a socially distanced high five.

Spending a lot of time on my C64 growing up I loved nothing more than entering line after line of programs printed in gaming magazines, often with errors and me giving up but sometimes with the excitement of seeing a moving shape on the screen. So I was wondering if this is something you guys had considered putting in a future magazine? I'm not talking about programming the next *GTA* in BASIC, but just something simple to bring back those old memories.

Keep up the great work.

Scott Morrall

Thanks for being a reader over the last few years, Scott! Type-in listings aren't something that we feel that we could do regularly. We don't really have the expertise to do this on team – we're far more comfortable writing prose than writing code – and we don't have hordes of people clamouring for us to publish their own type-ins. Having said that, we wouldn't rule out doing type-ins for special occasions. In fact, we have actually done this once in the past, back in issue 100. The game was a Commodore 64 game titled *RG Rampage*, in which Darran had to gather pages while avoiding security robots. *RG Rampage* was written by Jason Kelk, our long-term homebrew specialist who is currently still recovering from COVID-19 in hospital.



» [C64] Here's Darran, starring as the lead character in Jason Kelk's excellent *RG Rampage*.

HAUER DID WE SCREW UP?

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

In issue 216 page 55 it was stated that the late Rutger Hauer was a Danish actor. FYI, Rutger Hauer drew his first and last breath in The Netherlands, so that would make him Dutch and not Danish. He also starred in a bunch of Dutch movies.

Maurice Kessels

It's a fair cop, you're absolutely right – Darran got that one wrong. We imagine he'll be picking up a copy of *Blade Runner* on laserdisc and watching it as penance in the very near future. Still, we're glad that you're not holding that one against us!

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Slow Retro

Maybe we've just been spoiled by how active the retro-gaming scene has been in recent times, but this month it has felt like there wasn't as much on our plates as usual in terms of new games and products. Of course, that's probably just a natural spring slowdown as is common at this time of year, but it has certainly felt a little bit strange.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Treasure game?

Matt McMuscles
I truly believe *Sin & Punishment: Star Successor* is their magnum opus; deceptively simple gameplay, endlessly inventive, action packed and criminally underplayed. One of the best games in the Wii's library.

Howard Price
Gradius V. I had previously only played *Nemesis* and *Nemesis II* on the MSX and loved them both. Several console generations on, *Gradius V* proved to be an unbelievable experience.

ACO
Bleach: Dark Souls (DS). Yup! They did a couple of fighting games that were anime licensed. But don't worry, it's better than most, most of the time. Especially with multiplayer, which allowed for single-card download play.

Hereward Proops
Gunstar Heroes. What a game! Such inventiveness and energy. Some of the bosses really pushed the Mega Drive to its limits.

Graham Plowman
Astro Boy: Omega Factor is easily in my top five Game Boy Advance games. Addictive beat-'em-up with skill advances, and the story is a crazy deep dive into the world with tons of interesting moments.

Lee, from vectormen
McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure. I shouldn't have to justify this. Treasure, in a position to make free money at a mild blow to their cred, instead *doubled down*, making a game *at least* as good as *two Ristars*. They took Ronald McDonald, and therein all Nineties kids, *to the moon*.

Brynjólfur Erlingsson
Ikaruga. It was a completely different shooter experience, focusing heavily on strategic planning over being reactive. Plus the brain-melting mind-bender of having to think about flipping your ship based on the colours. It's like a completely unique puzzle

Stefano Castelli
I really think that *Silhouette Mirage* is one of their hidden gems. The gameplay is excellent, the base idea is very good and the funny scenes are hilarious. This really needs a remaster.

thegaminghubby
Alien Soldier. Came late in the day during the 16-bit era and encapsulated everything that made Treasure's games special: huge bosses, a technical marvel with well thought out mechanics. The culmination of all their efforts that came before.

retro GAMER

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Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

ISSN 1742-3155

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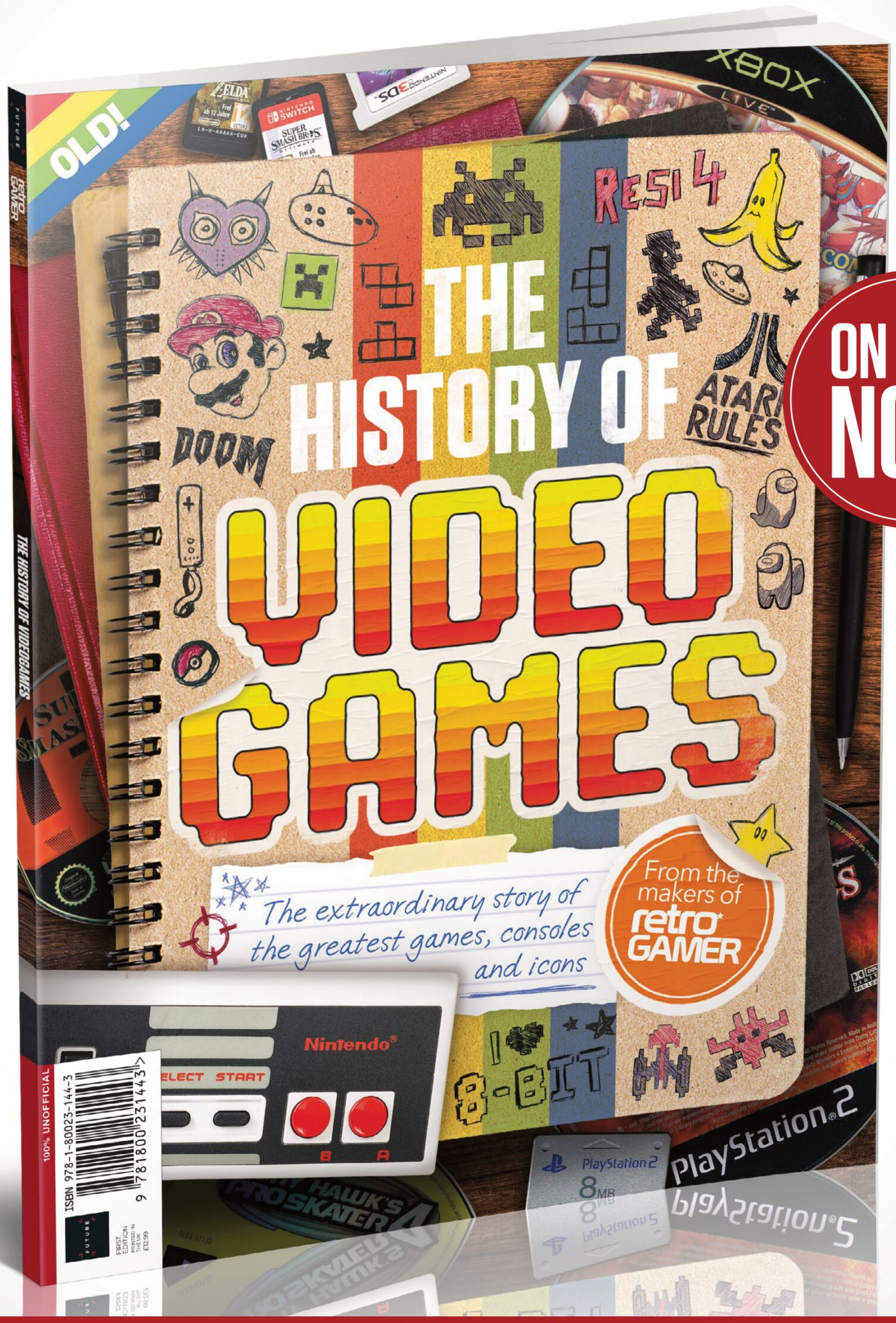

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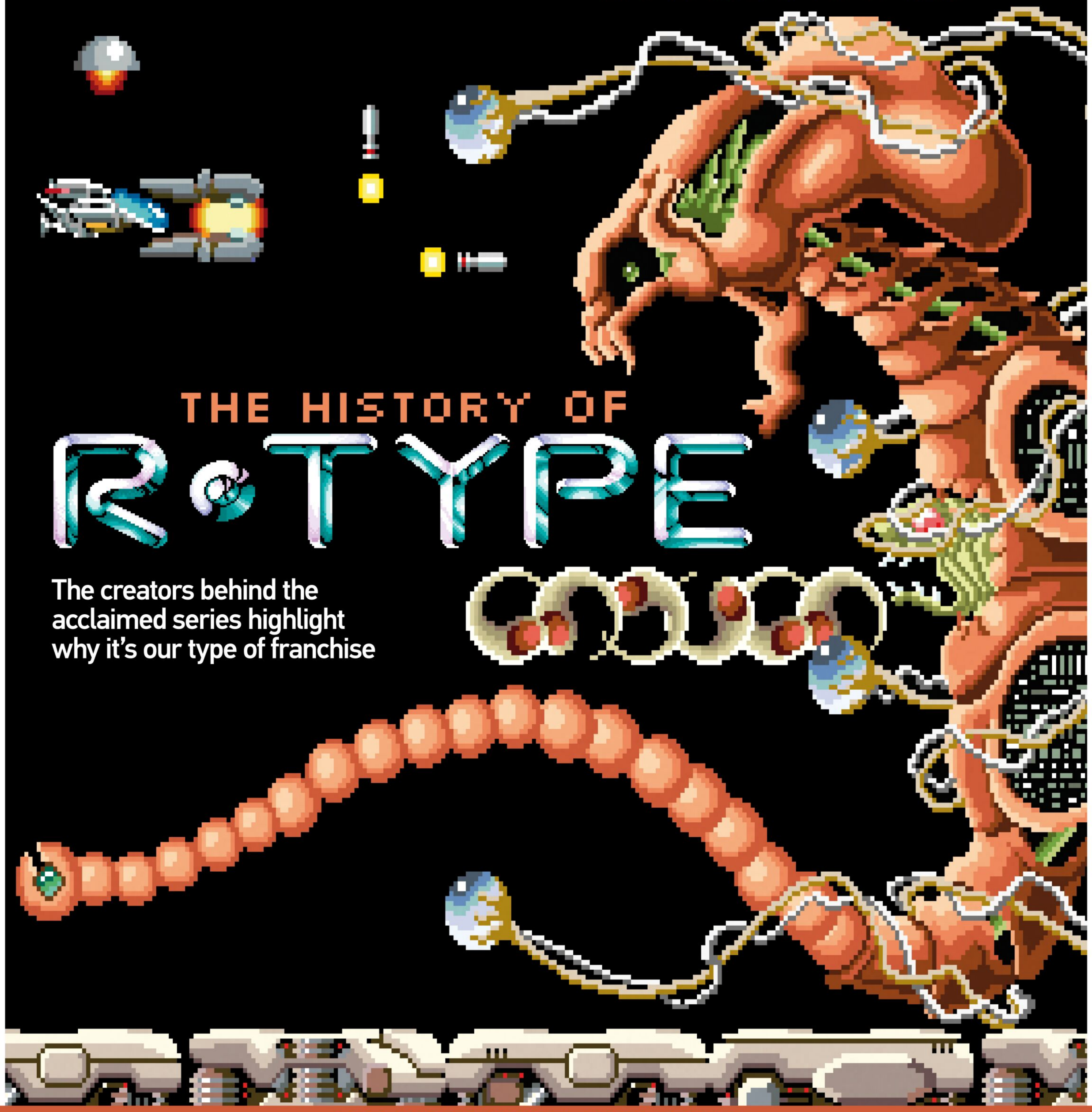

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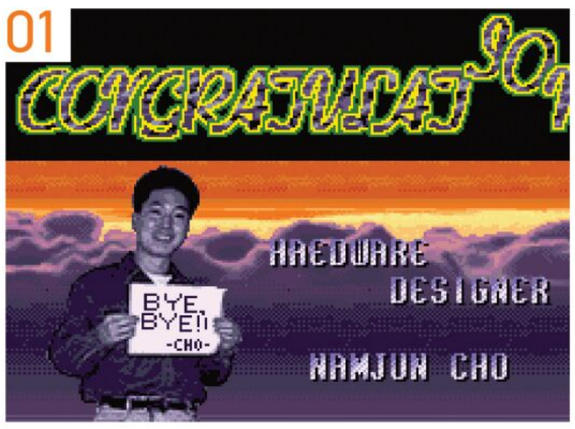
RED HAWK

» Do you need a brilliant plot in a shoot-'em-up? It would appear that the rather obscure Korean developer Afega didn't think so, as your ultimate victory in *Red Hawk* leads not to any kind of epilogue that you would expect, but a simple credits roll graced by the rather small development team. So without further ado, let's meet the people who brought *Red Hawk* into existence, via the medium of low resolution greyscale digital photographs.

01

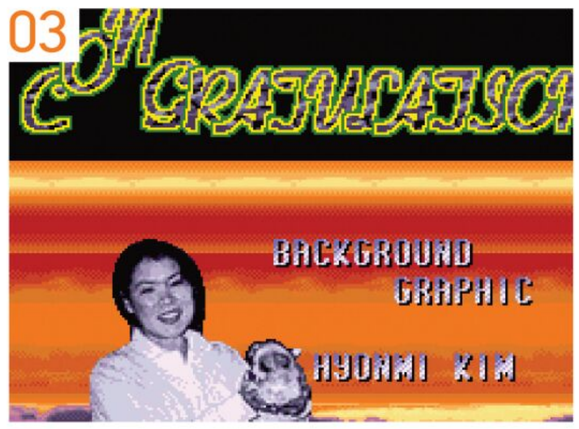


» Here is "haedware designer" Namjun Cho. He's a rather happy-looking guy, and he's even brought a sign to bid the player farewell. What's remarkable is how much his handwriting resembles a pixel font – we've never seen anything like this before.

02

» The person responsible for the game's sound was one Junghae Seo. Unlike everyone else, Junghae doesn't appear to have been comfortable with the idea of being photographed, shying away from the camera. Use your hair to cover your face!

03



» Hyonmi Kim did the background art and is clearly far more comfortable with the camera. It looks as though she's brandishing some kind of glove puppet, but the quality of the photography makes it hard to tell what's actually there. Write in and tell us what you think it is.

04

» The graphic director, Bongwon Son, clearly thinks himself too cool for all of this – just look at those folded arms. That is a facial expression that says "Fine, I'll play along with your silly photography, but know that I am above it". But he undoubtedly isn't, because he's posing anyway.

05

» Finally, program director and company president Haisung Ryou is fully into it. Combining an accountant's favourite casual Friday outfit with the kind of pose that suggests he's about to take part in a wrestling match, he makes the kind of fashion statement that resonates decades after *Red Hawk*'s release.

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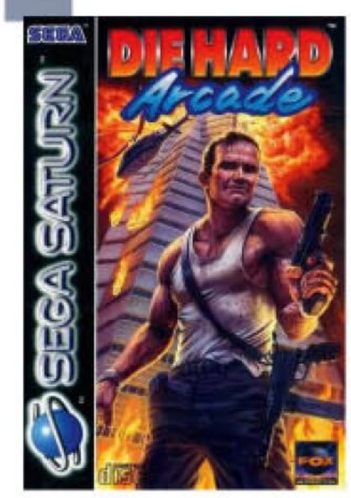

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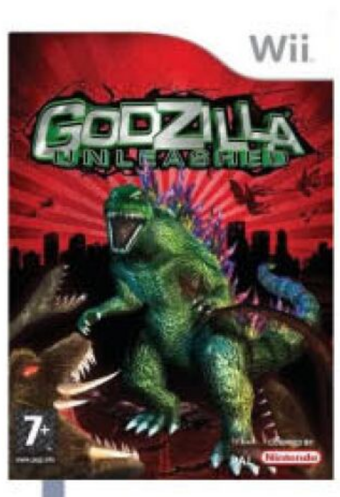

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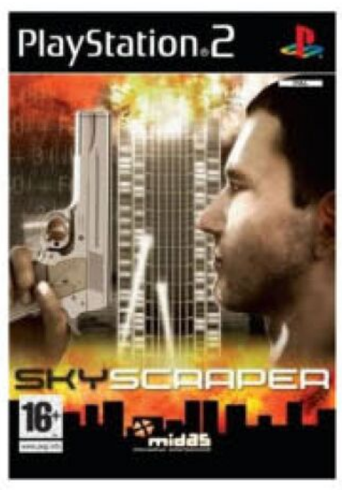

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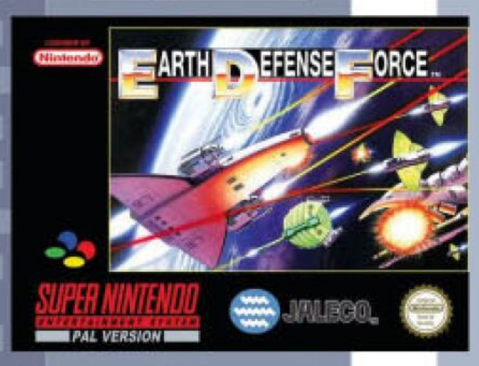

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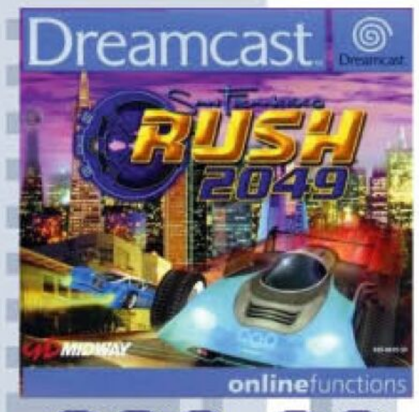

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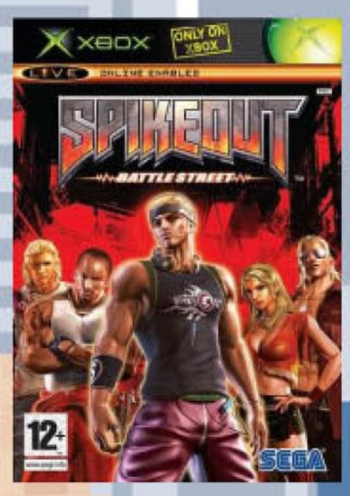

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